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AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 97 FEBRUARY 2016 \$8.95 inc GST

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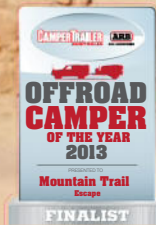
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| MODEL | TYPE | NITRO GAS KIT | FOAM CELL KIT | FOAM CELL PRO KIT |
|-------|------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
|-------|------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|

TOYOTA

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Landcruiser FJ/BJ 40, 42, 46 | LL | \$1390 | \$1564 | \$1830 |
| Landcruiser FJ45, 47 | LL | \$1698 | \$1874 | \$2138 |
| Landcruiser FJ/HJ 60, 61, 62 | LL | \$1500 | \$1676 | \$1940 |
| Landcruiser Bundera LJ 70/73 | CC | \$814 | \$990 | |
| Landcruiser FJ/HJ/HZJ 75 | LL | \$1529 | \$1705 | \$1969 |
| Landcruiser HZJ 76 | CL | \$1471 | \$1647 | \$1912 |
| Landcruiser HZJ 78/79 | CL | \$1515 | \$1691 | \$1956 |
| Landcruiser HJ/HZJ 80, 105 | CC | \$825 | \$1001 | \$1265 |
| Landcruiser Prado 90, 95 | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |
| Landcruiser Prado 120, 150 | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |
| Landcruiser HDJ/UZJ 100 IFS | TC | \$1062 | \$1238 | \$1502 |
| Landcruiser VDJ/UZJ 200 | SC | \$1023 | \$1155 | \$1419 |
| FJ Cruiser | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |
| Hilux LN/RN/YN 65, 105, 106 | LL | \$1302 | \$1522 | |
| 4Runner LN 61/YN63 | TL | \$1234 | \$1410 | |
| Hilux LN/RN/YN/VZN 130 V6 | TC | \$946 | \$1122 | |
| Hilux LN/RN 107, 110, 111, 167, SR5 | TL | \$1339 | \$1515 | |
| Hilux GGN25R, KUN26R | SL | \$1317 | \$1449 | \$1780 |

NISSAN

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Patrol MQ/MK G160 | LL | \$1676 | | |
| GQ SWB/LWB | CC | \$825 | \$1001 | \$1265 |
| GQ Cab Chassis Y60 (Leaf) | LL | \$1839 | \$2015 | |
| GQ/GU Cab Chassis (Coil) | CC | \$836 | \$1012 | \$1276 |
| GU Cab Chassis Y61 (Coil/Leaf) | CL | \$1410 | \$1586 | |
| GU Y61 Wagon | CC | \$836 | \$1012 | \$1276 |
| Navara D21 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Navara D22 | TL | \$1295 | | |
| Navara D40 | SL | \$1273 | \$1405 | \$1736 |
| Navara NP300 | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |
| Pathfinder WD21/Terrano | TC | \$946 | \$1122 | |
| Pathfinder R51 | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | |

HOLDEN

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Jackaroo UBS 25 & 69 | TC | \$946 | \$1122 | |
| Rodeo KB, TFS, RA, RA7 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Colorado 2007-2011 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Colorado 2012+ | SL | \$1340 | \$1472 | \$1802 |
| Colorado 7 | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |

ISUZU

| | | | | |
|-----------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| D-Max 2007-2011 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| D-Max 2012+ | SL | \$1340 | \$1472 | \$1802 |
| MU-X | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | \$1386 |

| MODEL | TYPE | NITRO GAS KIT | FOAM CELL KIT | FOAM CELL PRO KIT |
|-------|------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
|-------|------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|

FORD

| | | | | |
|------------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Courier | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | \$1735 |
| Ranger 2007-2010 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | \$1735 |
| Ranger 2011+ | SL | \$1416 | \$1548 | \$1879 |

JEEP

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Cherokee XJ | CL | \$1229 | \$1405 | |
| Grand Cherokee ZG, ZJ, WG, WJ | CC | \$814 | | |
| Wrangler TJ | CC | \$814 | | |
| Liberty KJ | SC | \$814 | | |
| Wrangler JK | CC | \$814 | | \$1254 |

LANDROVER

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----|-------|--------|--------|
| Defender | CC | \$847 | \$1023 | \$1276 |
| Range Rover/Discovery | CC | \$836 | \$1012 | \$1276 |
| Discovery Series 2/TD5 | CC | \$825 | \$1001 | |

MAZDA

| | | | | |
|----------------|----|--------|--------|--------|
| Bravo | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | \$1735 |
| BT50 2007-2010 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | \$1735 |
| BT50 2011+ | SL | \$1416 | \$1548 | \$1879 |

MITSUBISHI

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|--------|--------|--|
| Pajero SWB/LWB (Coil) | TC | \$946 | \$1122 | |
| Pajero SWB/LWB (Leaf) | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Pajero NM - NW | SC | \$924 | | |
| L200/Triton ME - MK | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Triton ML - MN | SL | \$1295 | \$1427 | |
| Triton MQ | SL | \$1318 | \$1450 | |
| Delica, L400 | TC | \$946 | | |
| Challenger PA | TC | \$946 | \$1122 | |
| Challenger PB | SC | \$924 | \$1056 | |

SUZUKI

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|--------|--|--|
| Sierra LJ, SJ | LL | \$1271 | | |
| Vitara / Grand Vitara | SC | \$940 | | |
| Jimny | CC | \$814 | | |

OTHER MODELS

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----|--------|--------|--|
| Hyundai Terracan | TC | \$1006 | | |
| SsangYong Musso | TC | \$1089 | \$1265 | |
| Great Wall V240 / 200 | TL | \$1295 | \$1471 | |
| Volkswagen Amarok | SL | \$1361 | | |
| Mercedes G55 | CC | | \$1012 | |
| Mahindra Pik-Up | TL | \$1339 | | |
| Mahindra Scorpio Wagon | TC | \$1133 | | |

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34



94





CAMPER TRAILER OF THE YEAR: PART I

- 34** INTRODUCTION
Twelve outstanding campers on test
- 42** MARS EXTREMO
Budget needn't mean bare
- 54** SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO
Great value, family-friendly
- 64** TAIPAN AURIGA
International star
- 74** MDC VENTURER LT CAPE YORK
The gear to go anywhere
- 86** TAMBO RUBICON
Old-school cool
- 94** PATRIOT X1
Evolution at its best
- 102** TJM RECOVERY GEAR
There when you need it
- 108** DARGO RIVER INN, VIC
The perfect High Country base

TRAVEL

- 124** EDITH FALLS, NT
A Top End paradise
- 132** DEEPWATER NP, QLD
Deepwater dreaming
- 140** MURRAY-SUNSET NP, VIC
A slice of the outback

FEATURES

- 116** AOR OWNERS' JAMBOREE
Frys Flat plays host

REGULARS

- 12** FIELD EDITOR'S LETTER
The art of a good yarn
- 14** NEWS
Get the scoop
- 18** ON THE WEB
What's happening online
- 21** BORGY'S BUSH MECHANICS
Amped up
- 27** ROTHY'S SHED
Meals to remember
- 148** BRIGHT IDEAS
Tried tips from true campers
- 150** BULLDUST
A pastry retreat
- 152** NO FIXED ADDRESS
Sweet peak
- 154** SHE'LL BE RIGHT
Towering hazards
- 156** ON THE ROAD
Real readers living the dream
- 158** CAMP COOKING
The Hunger Games
- 160** HOTSHOT
Dargo, Vic
- 162** EVENTS
Upcoming events around Oz
- 166** PRODUCTS
The latest gear



132

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THE CAMPFIRE



THE ART OF A GOOD YARN

I'm a bit of a sucker when it comes to those good old country pubs. A quick feed and a bit of gas-bagging with the locals always does the trick, but for some reason I usually end up leaving three days later with an empty wallet and a splitting headache! For me, it's all about the people I meet and the stories I hear along the way, but I reckon there's bit of an art to telling a good yarn.

You see, it all starts with a sense of adventure. Anything that's daring, funny or darn right crazy gets my tick of approval, but I'd be lying if I said I don't like spinning a yarn or two of my own as well.

You know, like the time old Stevo's front wheel was hanging on by a thread up the Cape and he had to cross the mighty Pascoe River in full flow. We laugh now, but at the time old Stevo was that red he was roughly one doughnut away from a full on heart attack!

Then there was the time we come across three backpackers skinny dipping in

croc-infested waters up near Port Stewart. They couldn't speak much English, but they rattled off just about every curse word you could think of when a croc stole a barra straight off my line about half an hour later! Holy dooly!

That was nearly as funny as the time we strapped a fake shark's head to a crab trap and got Uncle Ben to pull it up and get the shock of his life – I think he still has nightmares about that one, the poor bloke!

And, believe it or not, you don't have to be on a massive multi-month trip to earn a few bragging rights and make some long-lasting memories. Look, the point I'm trying to make here is pretty simple – suck the guts out of life people! The best yarns are backed by a wicked adventure and an open mind, so get out there, have a blast, share a yarn and then do it all again.

You can't argue with that now, can you?

— Borgy

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TRACK TRAILER GOES OUTBACK

Track Trailer's annual open day on December 12 drew a record crowd of around 500 existing and potential customers – many curious to have a behind-the-scenes look at the offroad specialist's new Outback HQ facility in Bayswater, Vic.

While about 20 campers spanning Track Trailer's own Mate, Tvan and Topaz ranges, plus a selection of Stockman Pod camper trailers, were on display, many visitors were particularly interested in touring the huge new showroom and the greatly expanded production area, where all Track Trailer products are now built under a single roof.

Four separate tours, each hosting about 50 people, were held throughout the day, while visitors in the showroom were kept busy looking at the range of current models or chatting with legendary Australian outback explorer, author and CTA columnist Ron Moon, who has crossed just about every made and unmade road in Australia in a Tvan or, more recently, in his Trakmaster Gibson pop-top.

Outback HQ suppliers ARB, Safari Snorkel, James Baroud tents and Bartlett Canvas also mounted product displays.

Outside in the car park, a band and a free sausage sizzle were attractive sideshows.

Track Trailer marketing manager Lloyd Waldron said the casual 'open house' atmosphere of the day resulted in a healthy number of product sales and quotes.

One Tvan getting plenty of attention was a MkIV Muranji seen for the first time fitted with the new 2016 options of a diesel heater, diesel hot water service and modular air-conditioning, combined with beefier 1.8t suspension.

Waldron said the considerable interest shown in these options by potential buyers indicated that the market would welcome them, and he predicted a strong take-up of all the options as a 'comfort' package on the top-of-the-range Tvan Muranji models.

Another highlight of the day was the presentation of the *Lap of the Map* Tvan to Wagga Wagga-based winning bidder Chris Pook. Charities Buy a Bale and Born to Run each received half of the proceeds from his winning bid of \$39,000 for the Mk3 Tvan Tanami that this year toured Australia with Channel 7 *Sunrise* weather presenter Edwina Bartholomew.

— Michael Browning

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Prospective buyers and curious onlookers inspect Track Trailer's expanded production facilities on one of five tours hosted throughout the day; Winning bidders Chris and Anita Pook take ownership of their new *Lap of the Map* Tvan; Professional outback adventurer Ron Moon talks 'shop' with a travelling enthusiast; There were about 20 campers on display to the public, inside and outside the showroom.



NEWS

ALTITUDE'S NEW HARDFLOOR MAKES LIGHT WORK OFFROAD

Altitude Campers has released an all-new, alloy, hardfloor, offroad camper with an easy-tow 980kg Tare, weighed with all standards including two batteries and a fridge.

The Australian-built Altitude Ultimate delivers almost 200kg in weight savings on previous models by switching to an alloy composite body and alloy frame and a fibreglass floor. The design was tweaked to maintain offroad integrity with the whole

ensemble riding on Vehicle Components independent suspension and Al-Ko offroad brakes with a DO35 coupling up front.

Key features include the Redarc Manager30 for a healthy charge to keep the two 120AGM batteries in ship shape and a diesel hot water system with shower set plumbed to two 80L water tanks.

Kitchen appointments include a three-burner Thetford Spinflo cooktop, Waeco 80L fridge and a roll out kitchen,

LEFT: All standard accessories are accounted for in the Altitude Ultimate's 980kg Tare. **ABOVE:** An increase in use of aluminium accounts for significant savings in weight.

that can swing around if required in poor weather conditions.

The Ultimate comes standard with a large nosecone storage upfront, a spacious four-berth tent that takes 45 seconds to erect and full length awning that covers the fridge and kitchen for an introductory price of \$39,990.

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BIG SCREEN ADVENTURE

Need some motivation to go exploring? The fifth annual Adventure Travel Film Festival will take place in the Victorian High Country town of Bright from February 14-16, 2016.

With 14 inspiring travel films and guests like CTA's own Ron and Viv Moon (pictured), the festival will get you set for adventure.

This year's line-up has a vehicle and 4WD flavour with documentaries like *14 Horsepower through Africa* from 1935, the recent motorbike epic *Somewhere Else Tomorrow*, which recounts a journey from Europe through Africa and Asia to Australia,

and the 4WD-based *In search of a river in war-torn Africa* by well-known adventurer and film-maker Andrew St Pierre White.

Other guests include Lang and Bev Kidby, who in 2015 drove a 1928 Austin 7 to Cape York; Jacqui Kennedy, who rode a postie bike around Australia; and Paul Pritchard, a Tasmanian who overcome a climbing accident to climb, kayak and raft around the world, and pedal a recumbent tricycle through Tibet to Mount Everest.

Visit www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com/australian-festival for more.



GO GLAMPING IN SOUTH-EAST QLD

A luxury camping resort is set to open on the banks of the Maroochy River later this year.

The 3.5-acre Rivershore Resort will provide options for all kinds of nature lovers, with caravan sites, extra-large all-grass sites right through to 15 glamping-style safari tents.

Facilities will include a cafe/restaurant, bar, family recreational areas, playground, a resort-style pool, spa and 25m lap space, and a separate children's pool with a water playground. Water sports and activities will include kayaking, stand up paddleboarding, and surfing among others.

Bookings will open soon. 

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AMPED UP

BORGY REWIRES THE TAIL LIGHTS IN HIS GRANDPA'S OLD CAMPER IN PART TWO OF HIS RESCUE RENO, PLUS HE ADDS A FEW EXTRA ELECTRICAL GIZMOS ALONG THE WAY!

WORDS MICHAEL BORG PICS MATT FEHLBERG

ABOVE: No drilling required! Finding identical replacement parts keeps things nice and simple when you're restoring an old rig.

As you might have guessed, this old camper is pretty much as basic as they come. There's no kitchen, no water tank and the only electrics you'll find are for the tail lights. Yep, this old girl is just a glorified bed on wheels and, to be honest, I don't really want to go messing around with things too much. I kind of like the fact that my 4WD is still the home for things like the water tank, kitchen and fridge. After all, it keeps the camper trailer's

Tare weight super low – under 300kg, I think. Plus, it means I can leave the old camper trailer at camp for a few days while I tackle the rougher stuff, and I'll still have all my gear on board with me. Okay, so maybe I wouldn't mind a few little creature comforts when it comes to the electrical side of things. So I'll start by replacing the old tail lights and wiring harness, then we'll add a few more bits and pieces along the way. Let's get to it, shall we?



REPLACING THE TAILS LIGHTS AND THE WIRING LOOM

As you'd expect from a 40-year-old camper, the tail lights weren't working very well. The lenses were all faded and the actual wiring was completely cactus, too. Now, you might be wondering why I didn't upgrade to LED tail lights, right? Well, I reckon the originals are a bit more authentic looking. Plus, I don't have to drill new holes everywhere to install a different style of lamp.

If you haven't replaced the tail light wiring loom before, I'll show you the ropes. First up, you'll need to remove the old harness but, before you get it out, pay close attention to where it runs. If the wiring threads through the chassis or any hard-to-reach places, try taping some string to the end of the wire before you pull it through. That way you can simply attach that same string to your new wiring harness and pull it back the other way through instead of threading the whole lot manually! Remember, hidden wiring is often more protected, but it's also harder to diagnose a problem or access for repairs. So wrap it in conduit, use rubber grommets and route it away from any sharp edges or heat sources to minimise the chance of a problem down the track.

Assuming you've already wired up the auxiliary plug to the wiring harness, it's time to double check which wire is which at the lamp end. Now, the wires are colour coded, so grab a test light and check each wire before you



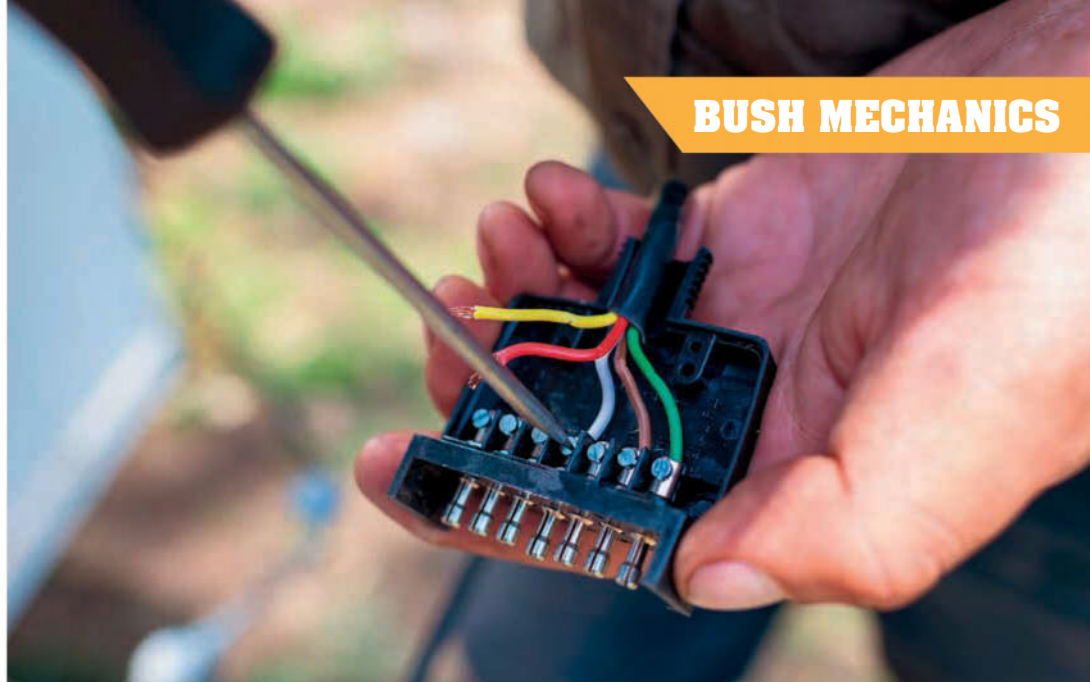
connect it to the lamp. For example, if you're about to attach the right blinker cable, turn the actual blinker on first and check the wire is working. Just make sure the exposed wire can't earth out on anything.

Hands down the hardest way to join electrical wires is to solder them together and seal them in heat shrink. If that's not an option, go for either a plug (waterproof), or crimp the terminals at a minimum.

Now look, wiring diagrams can differ depending on what lamps you have, what plugs and electrical cable you choose and what accessories you have fitted. All I can say here is to grab a pen and paper and draw up a good wiring diagram to follow. The job will almost certainly end up neater, and it'll save you throwing tools around the yard in frustration.



CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Double filament globes were used for brake and tail lights; Attaching wire to the existing loom will save you from chasing wires; The ArkPak provides plug and play portable power; Wiring the ArkPak via an Anderson plug to the vehicle; The new tail lights are installed, ready for adventure; Direct wiring away from sharp corners; Ensure electrical connections are solid and reliable; Colour coded wiring makes it easier to test and install.



BUSH MECHANICS



SIMPLE POWER

Like I mentioned earlier, I'm after a simple, easy and basic electrical system. After all, I'm only really going to power up a few LEDs, charge the phone and maybe use a small inverter every now and then. So I've chosen to run an ArkPak with a small deep-cycle battery. These are basically an all-in-one portable power station that can be mounted almost anywhere you want. They allow the battery to be charged via solar, 240V mains or 12V, and

work flawlessly in conjunction with your vehicle's dual battery system and, to be honest, they just save you a whole heap of extra wiring.

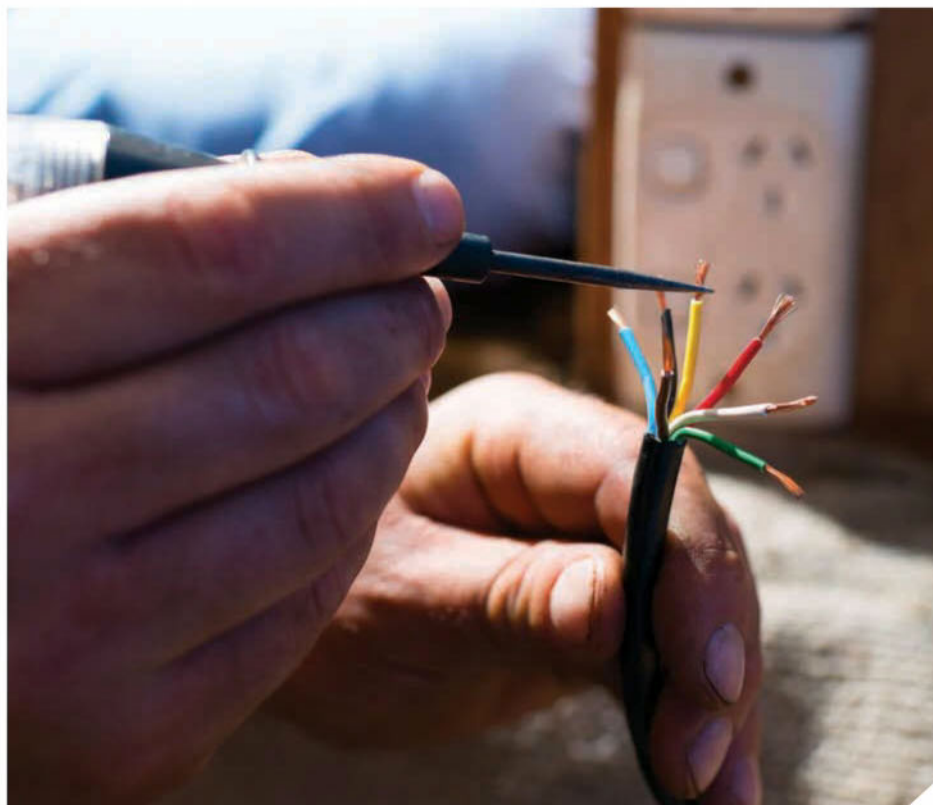
I've elected to make up a simple charging cable that connects the ArkPak to the charging cable on the back of my vehicle. Then I wired up one main cable from the ArkPak to a fused distribution block. That way, it's just a matter of hooking any accessories up like LED lighting straight to the distribution block.

12V WIRING AND LED TIPS

- A great tip is to leave the fuse out of the fuse holder until the wiring is complete. This helps safeguard against accidental short circuits while you're working away, which could potentially prevent an electrical fire or the cost of replacement parts.

- When it comes to LED wiring, always solder any electrical connections. Using standard terminals in conjunction with the small diameter of most LED electrical wire almost always results in a bad electrical connection, which only leads to electrical dramas down the track.

- Purchasing the wrong LED lighting strip for the job is a common reason for premature wear and failure. The materials used in the construction of flexible LED strips, aren't actually designed to be bent constantly. Over time, this will actually weaken the protective layer until it eventually gives out. If you don't plan on permanently mounting your LED light to a hard surface, make sure you use a rigid light bar.

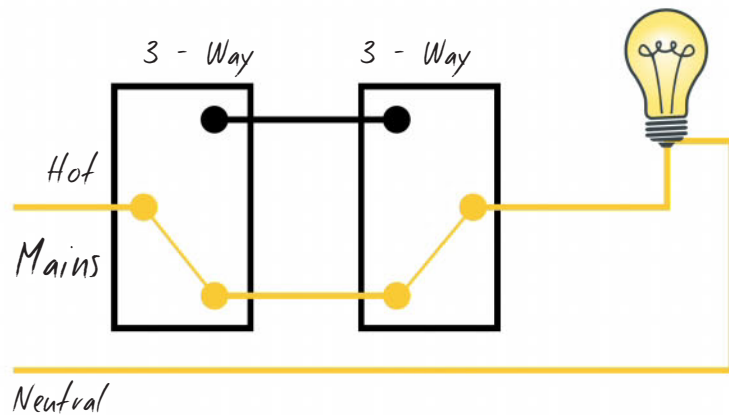
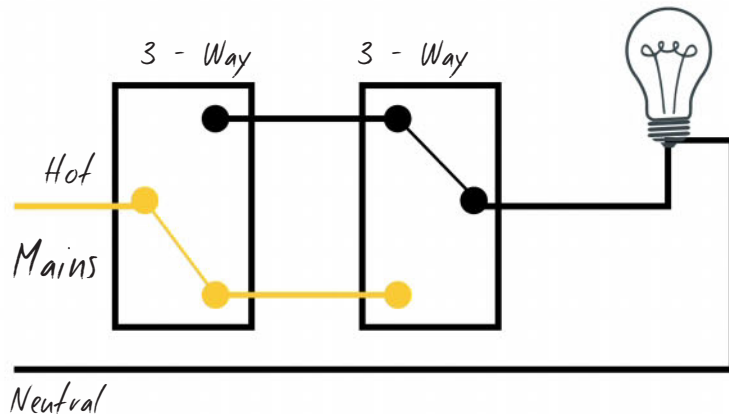


ONE LIGHT, TWO SWITCHES!

I'm a bit of a lazy camper these days, and I reckon there's nothing worse than having the light switch at the door when you want to turn it off from your bed. But there is a solution to this little dilemma. Thanks to some clever wiring, you can run two separate on/off switches on the one circuit to control the one load, in this case, the light.

Now, a 12V switch is a simple design. Current basically flows through the switch to the light. When you flip the switch off, it breaks the circuit and interrupts the flow of electricity.

When it comes to having two switches to control one light, the idea is still pretty simple, but you'll need to have what they call Single Pole Double Throw switches (SPDT), which basically have one power inlet terminal and two power outlet terminals, for a total of three on each switch. It's worth noting that the switch will only power one outlet terminal at a time. This system works by allowing either one of the switches to complete the circuit or cut the power at any given time.




READY TO ROLL



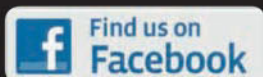
Well, there you have it – one old-school camper completely re-wired with a few basic upgrades as well. There are dead-set thousands of different setups you can sink your teeth into when it comes to electrical

upgrades and accessories but, if I've learned anything over the years, it's to plan your upgrades and you've got a much better chance of keeping everything nice and neat. Oh, and don't cheap out on the gear you buy

either; you really do get what you pay for with this stuff, and the damage that faulty electrical components and workmanship can cause to life and property are just not worth the risk. 



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MEALS TO REMEMBER

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE COOKING OVER A FIRE OUT UNDER THE STARS, ESPECIALLY AFTER A LONG DAY'S WORK.

WORDS JOHN 'ROOTHY' ROOTH PICS ANTHONY WARRY/LOW RANGE

Is there anything better than a meal cooked over a fire in the bush? I think not. And, after a lifetime of sharing the camaraderie of burning wood and cooking food (not always that way around), for me, it only gets better. So before you plan that big trip around the block or even the next weekend adventure, try and work out how you're going to include a few fire-cooked meals in the itinerary. This, after all, is what Aussie bush travel is all about!

Now, I've got to thank Sandi Johnson for sending me so many excellent photos from

the Bush Cook Off in Tasmania I attended last month. I wrote it up here, too, in the middle of a month of shows and trips all over the country and used several of Sandi's photos but, somehow, in all my confusion, she didn't get a mention.

"Yes Chooka, it might have had something to do with the copious amounts of cold beer required to refresh the palette between courses. And do you mind not leaning over me? You're spilling beer on the napkin I'm writing this yarn on. How do you expect them to believe I'm



ABOVE: My simple cooking setup for beach travel packs down into a couple of small boxes. All up it cost about \$500 from BCF. The big thing to look for in a 'mobile' kitchen is the burner temperature, which is measured in BTUs. My Coleman FyreKnight pumps 12,000BTUs per ring, or 24,000 total. Much less and you'll be waiting instead of wokking.



ABOVE: A mate asked me to pick up a blue cattle dog (above) on death row in Wagga. He was such a beaut little fella, I decided to keep him. When I went to my friend's place to tell her I was keeping him, we – the blue dog and I – decided we liked her newest little mate, too.

ABOVE RIGHT: Fires burn differently depending on where you are and what sort of wood you've got. As a rule of thumb, if wood's heavy, it'll burn slow and make great long lasting coals. If it's light, it'll burn quickly and the coals won't be as durable so you need to adjust your cooking times and methods accordingly.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Never be frightened of using huge flavour and a bit of lateral thinking can really change things too. Here's an example of both, 'spaghetti and meatballs'. The meatballs are chopped up Italian sausage! Intense flavour, minimum effort.

FAR RIGHT: The simple tripod has been around since Viking days and is a great way to adjust a pot over flames or coals to vary the heat. One of the advantages is you can stoke the fire without disturbing the food. The other is that lovely smoke-infused flavour.

a professional writer-type bloke if my copy comes down with dribbles on it?

"They might even think I'm knocking out some words while waiting for a counter lunch at the Mudflats Hotel. My goodness, that'd never do..."

IN THE BELLY

Talking food because, if I don't, my stomach does, I figured I'd better expand a bit (like my belt over the years...) on some of my favourite bush cooking techniques. Having had to cook under some incredible conditions in some incredible places over the years, I've come to believe that almost anything's possible in the bush as long as your victims, err, companions, have had a few drinks before the meal is served.

Sometimes that can be too many. Memories come flooding back, like the first cold beer going down after a hot desert crossing. But the big one has to be a trip several years ago where we were exploring some of the wilder parts of the west coast of Tasmania.

Now, this is a windswept part of the world where amazing things happen and the

weather can change quicker than Aussie prime ministers. We'd been battling into the night up a black soil track that had mud holes over the bonnet, trying to make it to a nice little grassy spot I'd remembered from a previous trip. Sheltered by some hedge-like trees, with a morning view over the beach, it fulfilled a whole lot of demands from the videographers and the stills shooter as well as providing enough room to circle the wagons.

On that trip we had a couple of sponsors with us; Glen Hadden from Roo Systems had brought his brother in law 'the Super Coach' along for the ride and TJM had sent wild man Donny 'The Christian' Shewring to drive a much modified Toyota. None of these chaps were strangers to the odd beer. In fact, you could safely say they drank the even numbered beers with the same amount of gusto. It was a work trip for me but a party trip away from home for the sponsors, as usual (Gee, I hope my wife reads that last line. And I hope she believes it...)

So we've reached my grassy patch well after dark, after *Milo* blew an axle in a puddle, and everybody's cold, wet, filthy and starving.



Beauty. It's kind of hard to get a hot meal to taste bad when you can hear bellies rumbling. The TV team set the scene and I was blinded by lights as I put together a big Guinness roast recipe in the old cast iron pot.

It was big enough to take a couple of hours in hot coals, but that time got soaked up going through the motions of another cooking segment that we'd blown the night before in far worse conditions on the beach itself. Gale force winds don't always do it for voice quality, apparently...

Meanwhile, the sponsors are tucking into their fridges with all the appetite of a politician at a party fundraiser. I couldn't hear this because they had to keep quiet anyway and all I could see was the occasional silhouette behind the camera.

Finally, shortly before midnight, the roast is carved, the dark, mushroom-thickened Guinness gravy is draping itself over a bed of meat and mashed potatoes and it's time to do the 'glory reveal'. This is when someone gets invited in to taste the meal on camera, shortly before we all get fed and go to bed.

It's usually a sponsor, so I've called out for



ROOTHY'S SHED

ROOTHY'S SHED




Glen to come on up, knowing that his Irish blood and huge frame would make 'meat and potatoes' almost irresistible.

There was a big crashing sound as one of the light stands got demolished and suddenly Glen appeared in the lights, barging at the presentation table like a bear on a rampage. He was supposed to come around and face the camera but, no, he just put his head down and destroyed that plated masterpiece. He was all hands and whiskers and, in a series of slurps and belches, dinner disappeared.

Now, I knew we'd be filming that again anyway, so it was no surprise when our producer made the call. Apparently they couldn't film anyway – Gav the cameraman was doubled over with laughter and had missed the focus entirely and there was a bit of an issue with lighting, given one of the LED panels was lighting up the moon.

It turned out to be one of the best meals I've ever cooked on the road, more thanks to some beautiful Tassie beef mixed in with Guinness and that perfect salty air blowing off the ocean. I love Tasmania...

I love cooking, too. Now I know most of you are probably right into your bush cooking and I've been fed some absolute delicacies by fellow travellers on my own travels, too. But for those who've not tried it yet or who've not thought of including some fire pit-friendly stops in their tour, please, consider! 



TOP: Yep, I got home with two dogs and now I'm sleeping out on the back verandah until my wife gets used to the idea. Ah well, at least it's an excuse to cook outdoors.

ABOVE: Keeping food refrigerated is the vital thing when you're travelling, and *Milo's* old fridge has been the most used and most reliable accessory I've ever beaten the hell out of! Trick with fridges is always to make sure they can breathe – like people, they like a bit of air.

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WORDS MAX TAYLOR PICS NATHAN JACOBS AND MATT FEHLBERG

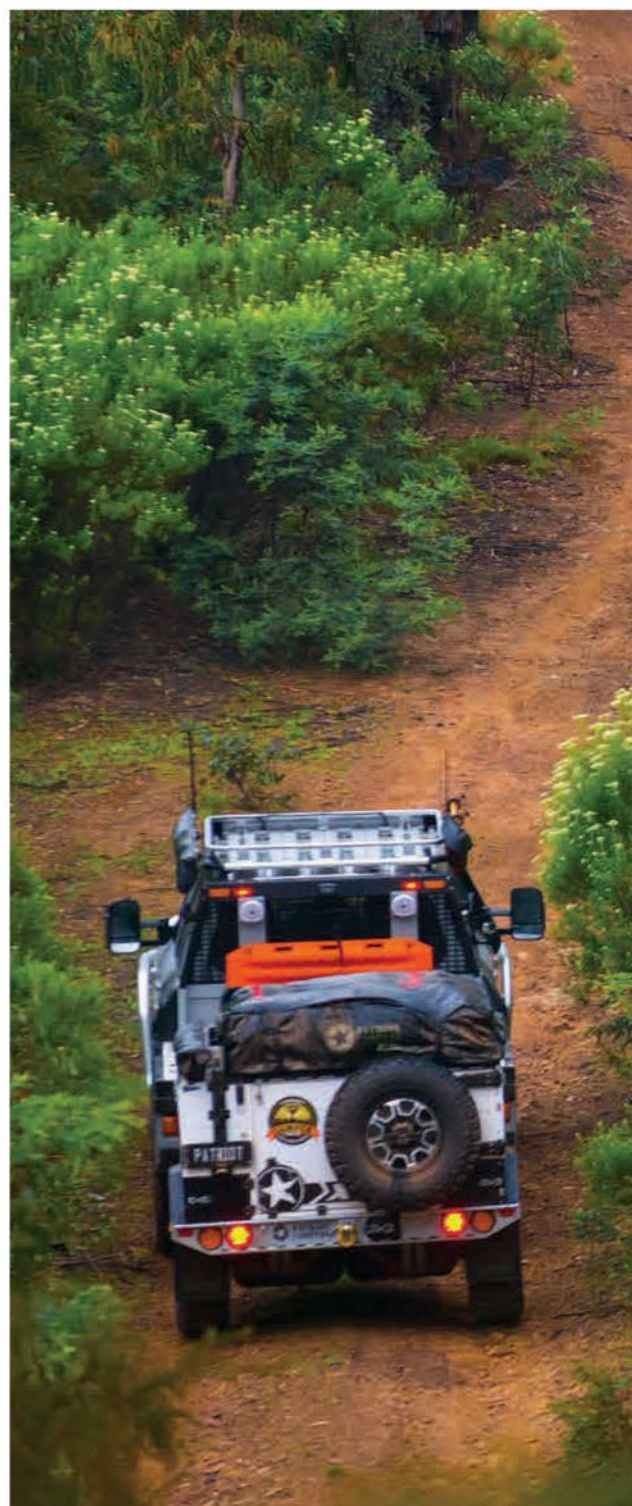
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INTRODUCTION





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Cub team towing the Kamparoo Brumby (CTOTY Part 2) emerges from the High Country fog; Cookie checks out the MDC Venturer LT Cape York Edition; The Patriot is put through its paces; Our judging crew inspect the underbelly of the Skamper Kampers Dingo; Lights, Cameras, Action. Max Taylor gives us a rundown on all the track-side action at the COTY event; Borgy leaves no stone unturned in his appraisals.

Well, we're at it again. That's right, we've assembled some of the best campers money can buy and put them through their paces in order to crown winners in four categories: Budget (up to \$20K); Softfloor (up to \$50K); Hardfloor (up to \$65K); and Hybrid.

And so it was on a Monday morning in November when we descended on Dargo, a quiet town in the Victorian High Country. Our host: the Dargo River Inn, a spectacular spot with awesome camping facilities. And a bar. And amazing parmas.

We wasted no time. The photographers and filming crews went to work, while the judges began poking and prodding each camper in turn. As evening descended, Celso from Mars Campers got busy on his rig's barbecue. With the smell of lamb and chicken kebabs in the air and the beer starting to flow, the day was over.

When it was time to hit the local tracks, it became apparent that not all vehicles were prepared for the job, with a couple fitted with highway tyres rather than something with more aggressive tread. The result: one vehicle (camper attached) stuck halfway up a serious incline, unable to go forward and unable to go



INTRODUCTION

WHO ARE WE TO JUDGE?

OUR JUDGES MIGHT BE AN UNRULY BUNCH BUT, BETWEEN THEM, THEY BROUGHT DECADES OF CAMPING EXPERIENCE TO THE CTOTY TABLE.



MICHAEL 'BORGY' BORG

As the field editor of *Camper Trailer Australia*, Borgy has lived and breathed the camping lifestyle for decades. In a previous life, he earned a quid spinning spanners, which comes in handy out on the tracks. When he's not working on *Toot the Troop Carrier* or his modified 80 Series *Uncle Grump*, Borgy's feeding all his bait to the fish in bush streams or cooking up a storm in his camp oven.



DAVID 'COOKIE' COOK

Cookie has been a keen camper for many years, undertaking a number of outback trips as well as more frequent local journeys from his home in Sydney each year. A qualified geologist, Cookie really knows how to read a track. He has combined an established career in magazine journalism and photography to become a regular contributor to *Camper Trailer Australia*.



JOHN 'BEAR' WILLIS

With a history in trailer manufacturing and boat building, Bear knows a few things about engineering and isn't afraid to call it as he sees it. A returning judge for Camper Trailer of the Year, Bear is fond of creature comforts, and has little patience for poor design and intricate assembly procedures. Bear's happiest when dangling a line in a mountain stream.



STUART 'STUPOT' JONES

Stupot is a CTOTY institution who has been a judge at every event since its first running six years ago. Getting about in a Nissan Patrol, Stupot is a High Country fanatic who lives and breathes 4WDing and camping, but his day job is as circulation manager at Bauer Trader Media, the publisher of *Camper Trailer Australia*.



INTRODUCTION

GROUND RULES

BEFORE SETTING OFF, WE LAID DOWN 10 CRITERIA BY WHICH WE JUDGED EACH CAMPER TRAILER.

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED PURPOSE

Judging campers can sometimes be like comparing apples and oranges, with different rigs aimed at different markets. This point allowed judges to assess how well each camper suited its stated market.

INNOVATION

New features and options were highly regarded at Camper Trailer of the Year.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

How long would the camper sustain you in the bush? Things like water and power capacity were important here.

QUALITY OF FINISH

The quality of fittings, the welds and canvas can mean the difference between a good camper and an exceptional camper.

BUILD QUALITY AND CONSTRUCTION

The structural integrity, engineering quality and durability of the camper's components, including canvas, were assessed here.

BUSH-ABILITY

How well the camper performed off the beaten path was an important factor; after all, isn't getting off the bitumen what camping is all about?

SPECIFICATIONS AND COMFORT

The added extras that make your time in the bush more comfortable were judged here, including the kitchen, bedding arrangements, electronics, hot water and so on.

EASE OF USE

Was the camper quick to set up and easy to use once erected? Campers with efficient layouts and speedy set up times rated highly here.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Did this camper live up to its promise, and did it give buyers what they were paying for?

X-FACTOR

The hardest point to articulate, here, the judges decided if the camper just had that certain something.



TOP: Photographer Nathan Jacobs shoots the CTOTY convoy as it weaves through the High Country terrain.
ABOVE: Celso Prado from MDC Campers lures a weary crowd with the waft of lamb and chicken kebabs.

back down. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

Fortunately, we had all the recovery gear we needed, thanks to TJM. As luck would have it, the Patriot rig was in front of the stuck camper. Why was that lucky? Well, Patriot Campers owner Justin Montesalvo gets around in a chopped, diesel-chipped 200 Series with more torque than you could shake a stick at. He simply reversed his vehicle (with camper still attached – it wasn't safe to unhitch) and we worked quickly – the rain was coming in, the tracks were become slippery, and the hour was late – to fit a snatch strap between the stuck ute and the Patriot X1.


With the ute secured, Justin hit the go-pedal and all four vehicles (two 4WDs and two campers) powered up the incline in a raw display of torque.

The weather wasn't particularly kind throughout the week. Heavy rain came in at the tail end of our shoot at Italian Flat, a terrific campground not far from Dargo, and a stiff wind blew over the awning on my own 80 Series. Literally, the wind blew the awning over

the roof rack and on to the other side of my vehicle. That's another lesson: always use pegs and guy ropes, even if the weather is as calm as it was that morning. The awning survived more or less undamaged. My ego, on the other hand...

By Thursday, the squall began to subside and the sun shone on our little slice of the High Country. Spirits lifted, we resumed shooting and testing and when Friday evening came, there was only one thing left to do: tally up the results.

In this issue, we're focussing on the Budget and Softfloor categories. The MDC Venturer LT (Cape York Edition), Mars Extremo, Taipan Auriga and Skamper Kampers Dingo vied for the title in the Budget class, while the Patriot X1 went head-to-head with the value-packed Tambo Rubicon in the Softfloor category.

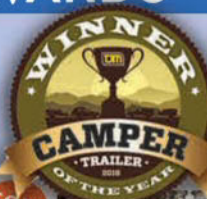
We'll reveal the results of the remaining categories next month. But for now, sit back, get something out of deep freezer, a beer from the fridge, and enjoy. 

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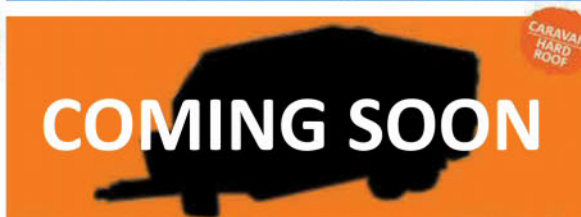
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PICS NATHAN JACOBS AND MATT FEHLBERG





MARS EXTREMO



To the Extreme

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PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



WORDS JOHN 'BEAR' WILLIS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The 1040kg Tare provides minimises resistance offroad; Overnight stops are managed by remote control; Independent suspension for comfort on and offroad; The large tent provides shaded living space often lacking in hardfloors; Bash plates protect the water supply; The KYB shocks are easy to replace.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > Combination of inclusions and accessories
- > Ease of assembly
- > Loading capacity and towing weight
- > Independent suspension
- > Galvanised and Hammertone chassis and box.
- > Honest value for money

MISSSES

- > Kitchen benches a little low
- > Annexe doesn't cover fridge
- > Limited but sensible electronics and power



I'd like to say I've been on a trip to Mars and back, but that would be telling a porky pie of intergalactic proportions. However, as a judge at the 2016 Camper Trailer of the Year competition, hosted at Dargo in Victoria's beautiful High Country, my expectations were elevated to new levels by the Mars Extremo XHF16 Hard Floor. To be frank, *Camper Trailer Australia* has been criticised for allowing campers of imported origins into the magazine, let alone into the Camper Trailer of the Year awards, yet many of the foreign-built offerings dominating the Up to 20K division surpassed our expectations. The Budget division is exceptionally popular with the wider camper market and the numbers sold speak volumes for their broad acceptance.

Mars Campers is a market leader in this segment, but mark my words: don't underestimate the quality or capabilities of its camper trailers. The value for money is undeniable, the build quality high and a sensible array of standard features, accessories and options make camper trailing easy, enjoyable and accessible.

While softfloor campers enclose a tremendous undercover area for large families and extended stays, hardfloor campers such as the Mars

Extremo are just so much simpler for your travels – intergalactic or not. The last thing you want after a hard day on the road, when you're short on hands and patience, is to spend an hour erecting all manner of canvas with the ensuing frustrations, exertion and arguments as you arrive at (or en-route to) your personal tranquillity. The Mars Extremo can be assembled for an overnigher in less than five minutes.

This attractive hardfloor package folds over with the aid of gas struts and the clutch of a remote control 3000lb electric winch, and packs up again just as easily after a good night's sleep. There is a minimal amount of pole adjustment required and, for a longer stay, you may wish to attach either the 2.3m awning roof, or the complete set of midge-proof annexe walls and PVC floor for the full enclosure.

RIDING GEAR

Mars mission control is based on a firm foundation. It has a strong 100x50x3mm drawbar evolving into a solid welded and galvanised chassis finished in Hammertone paint. Mars manufactures its own fully independent trailing arm suspension with dual KYB shockers each side, coil springs, 10in electric



MARS EXTREMO





stoneguard, mounted spare wheel and the remote electric winch complete with its extendable strap roller to make life really easy. Then there's a large checkerplate alloy combination module that will securely house two 20L jerry cans and two 9L gas cylinders (jerry cans and gas cylinders are options) as well as a full-width storage cavity with fridge slides on the kerb side. All doors and compartments are fitted with automotive seals and compression locks to keep out those fine red dust particles, common to the rugged Mars environment.

The roof of the rear-fold Extremo is very solid and can carry up to 400kg in weight for quad and motorbikes, kayaks and other equipment. The ridged skid plates provide enormous strength for the fold over and a solid grounding for its convertible role as 2200x1700mm floor. Inside is a practical checkerplate finish over the composite structure which will give many light years of trouble free, easily cleaned, non-skid service. It may not be as cosy as carpet but it is more practical. The small floor elevation also seems to keep things cleaner and tidier, and doesn't attract that nasty cosmic dust and uninvited crawling visitors.

The internal fit-out features a queen-size foam mattress on a solid marine ply base that easily pivots up to reveal a deep storage space. It has a very strong galvanised steel base and frame. To

brakes and 15in alloy wheels, all firmly attached to the towing module by a 2t poly-block tow hitch for traversing the roughest lunar landscape. Underneath, the landing gear includes wind-down stabiliser legs, a 70L stainless steel water tank complete with checkerplate alloy stoneguard for added security, and plumbing and wiring that is neat and tidy with minimal obstruction. The height is set for a low centre of gravity but proved to be no hindrance when we navigated the rough Dargo offroad moonscape. At worst, it makes the kitchen benches and cooktop just a little lower than most.

WHAT IT'S GOT

Out front, we find an Anderson lead and plug, handbrake, your choice of a swing-down or detachable jockey wheel, a full-width mesh

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The gull wing box provides full access to the fridge; The kitchen takes up little room in transit; The canvas door doubles as an awning; The sturdy alloy checkerplate floor; Canvas protects the opening mechanism; Cooking essentials close at hand; There's ample icebox storage.

CTA RATES MARS EXTREMO

| | BORGY | STUPOT | BEAR | COOKIE |
|------------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| 1 Suitability for intended purpose | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 2 Innovation | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 3 Self-sufficiency | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 4 Quality of finish | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 5 Build quality and construction | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 6 Bush-ability | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 7 Specifications and comforts | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 8 Ease of use | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 9 Value for money | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 10 X-factor | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |



aid easy loading and packing, the huge internal storage is also accessible from the rear space port. Lighting is provided by one LED strip light positioned on the main tent's centre pole, and it is operated by remote control. There are 12V outlets outside of the Extremo lunar module for charging the laser guns, communications equipment and so on. Power is supplied as standard by a single 70Ah AGM battery which is charged via the Anderson plug, however a full range of power and storage options are available as desired.

UNDER COVER

You will feel warm and cosy in winter and cool in summer in the 14oz rip-stop canvas tent. The canvas has been treated with waterproof hydrophobic polymer to minimise water ingress

and there are plenty of windows with both internal and external awnings to repel the solar extremes. All windows and awnings have midge-proof mesh to keep the unwanted arrivals at bay. As with nearly all campers, assembling the annexe can be the hardest part. The Mars Extremo's annexe measures 4550x2300mm and it runs from the front of the box to the rear of the fold-over with a gabled front. Even the poles feel quite solid and it's probably a 10 minute exercise to get the assembly right for two people. Add more time if you want to attach the complete set of side awnings and PVC floor for an extended exploratory mission.

Mars positioned a large slide-out kitchen in the front of the tub on the kerb side. The slides seem quite strong and so does the galvanised stainless



MARS EXTREMO



STUPOT'S SAY:

Mars Campers squeezed an awful lot into the Extremo for its sub-\$14k starting price.

Almost anyone can open it in no time at all with the hardfloor design and a 1.36t remote control electric winch, although the awning needs a bit more work.

The kitchen was set a bit low for my liking but its bush-ability credentials are good with the stoneguard, dual shock independent suspension, a poly-block coupling and even a stoneguard over the water pump.

It's an honest, entry-level camper.



BORGY'S SAY:

The Mars Extremo is a great entry-level camper for the Aussie battler.

The new electronics are better than what I'd previously seen from Mars and the electric winch offers a simple setup for buyers on a budget.

The tent zippers are a bit flimsy, but the stainless steel latches and Hammertone finish offer good resistance to the elements.

There's little clearance, but it has independent suspension, offroad hitch and shocks that are easy to source in the bush.



MARS EXTREMO

CTA SPECS

MARS CAMPERS EXTREMO

> TRAILER

Tare 1040kg

ATM 1500kg

Suspension Ind. trailing arms with coils and dual KYB shocks each side

Brakes Heavy duty 10in electric with handbrake and brake controller

Coupling 2t poly-block

Chassis Fully welded, galvanised and painted box section

Drawbar 100x50x3mm galvanised and Hammertone finished

Body 2mm galvanised with Hammertone paint

Wheel/tyre 235/75 R15 alloy mags with new AT tyres

Style Rear-fold, hardfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 1800x2200mm

Length (hitch to tail lights) 4300mm

Tent 4550x1700mm, plus 4550x2300mm annexe

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x9kg holders

Water 1x70L

Cooktop Gasmate four-burner with wok burner

Kitchen Stainless steel sink with pressurised cold water and a folding stainless bench extension

Battery 1x100Ah AGM

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$15,739

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (03) 9998 1674

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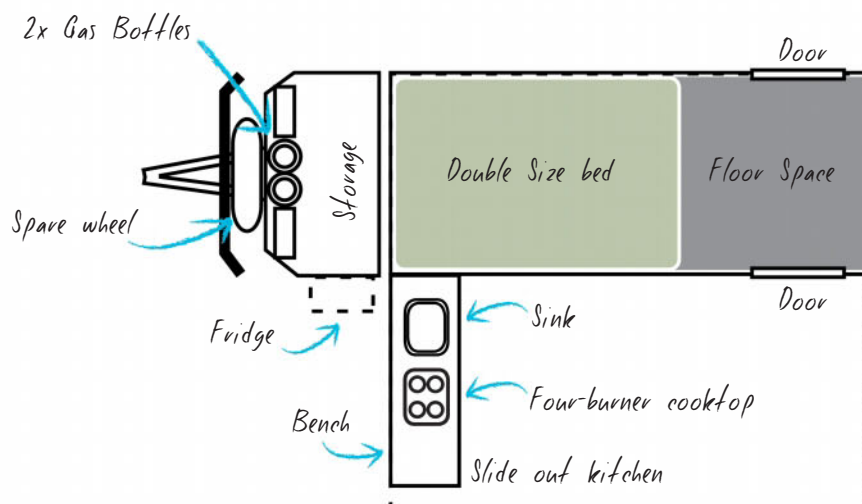
- > More pictures
- > Specs to compare
- > Video test



steel combination unit finished in Hammertone paint. A further hinged stainless bench top folds out and the whole unit is stabilised with adjustable legs. It features a Gasmate four-burner gas cooktop with a wok burner but you will have to connect the gas bottle to use it, as it isn't permanently plumbed. There's a stainless steel sink and cold pressurised water but minimal pots, pans and utensils storage close at hand. The optional fridge slides out from the box on the drawbar and, while this doesn't bother me, I did hear the comment that you have to leave the shade of the annexe to use it. I see it this way – given that we're talking about a hardfloor camper, shown here for \$15,739, that comes with a spare wheel, gas cylinder



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: There's plenty of room to store your bags under the bed, with nifty side panels to keep essentials in place during transit; The winch is operated by remote control; External 12V provide a power source for a radio or an extra light; All your power needs can be managed from one point.



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MARS EXTREMO



and jerry can mounts, battery and switch gear, a full kitchen with pressurised water and solar panels, I think I can live with walking to the fridge!

We find a further dust-free compartment in the road-side of the trailer that houses the power control panel. Inside is a main isolator, digital battery voltage and charge indicators, an Anderson plug and individually fused switches for the pump, lights, fridge and powerpoints. Chargers, inverters, more batteries and so on are available as options but to be honest many prospective buyers in this price range are often willing to forgo a few luxuries. Up front, opposite the fridge compartment, is a lockable storage box that is large enough for two reasonable sized coolers or a heap of travelling necessities, again all fitted with dust-proof seals.

All up, the Mars Extremo needs very little propulsion to get her into outer space, or the wilderness in real terms! This starship weighs in at 1040kg Tare and has a satisfying loading capacity of 1500 ATM. The ball weight is already a reasonably heavy 130kg, so care

should be exercised to load the star command module appropriately before takeoff.

Mars is a fast growing company with a manufacturing base in China. It assembles and distributes its campers locally from Melbourne and Brisbane via 23 sales and service dealerships Australia-wide. One regional dealer who attended Camper Trailer of the Year in Dargo claimed he'd sold more than 100 Mars campers in the last 12 months through his dealership alone, such is the brand's appeal.

THE VERDICT

The Mars Extremo is not only extremely affordable, it is light to tow and will be fine behind many family vehicles, including some 2WDs. Many families will find the unit extremely attractive for limited sojourns to recognised camping grounds providing a terrific array of cover, comfort and features.

However, don't be surprised to see one pass you by on your next offroad trek into the outer limits of your personal utopia. The Extremo will get a lot of people out camping. **CTA**

BELOW: The Extremo opens up offroad touring to budget campers.

ABOVE RIGHT: The kitchen is well-positioned with just a short stroll to the fridge.



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12V POWER SETUP STANDARD

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STUNNING VIEWS FROM INSIDE AND A FAMILY-FRIENDLY LAYOUT ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DINGO HARD FLOOR, SKAMPER KAMPERS' GREAT VALUE OFFROADER.

PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS





SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO





WORDS STUART 'STUPOT' JONES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The kit rides on independent coil suspension with dual shocks. Note the recovery point at the rear; The Ark Extreme jockey wheel swings up and is height adjustable as well; The Dingo's departure angle is pretty good; Awnings over the windows keep the Dingo's interior cool; The Dingo rides on a one-piece chassis and drawbar.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > The value and inclusions offered in the \$20k package
- > The ergonomics of the kitchen setup
- > The dinette setup

MISSES

- > Lots of poles make setting up for extended stays a bit fiddly
- > Dinette setup (I'd need to take it away to make up my mind)



For \$20,000, there is plenty of trailer in the Skamper Kamper Dingo package. And when all packed up behind your 4WD, it's a good looking rooster, too. Aimed at buyers from many demographics, I see this forward-fold unit most appealing to empty nesters looking for personal space on the road, or young families where the whole brood needs to be under the same roof.

The ergonomics of this trailer, with the kitchen at the rear, really works for me. It allows the cook to be in the middle of the action for those times when you need eyes in the back of your head. From the same spot, you can handle kitchen duties, keep an eye inside the trailer if you have toddlers, chat to those at the dinette, and see what is happening outside around camp. Yes, there's a walk back

to the fridge when you forget the butter (or need another frothy or bubbles top up) but you'll need to make compromises on any trailer and this layout is a pretty good option.

The slide-out kitchen is a complete stainless steel unit containing a three-burner Dometic cooktop with a sink and tap plumbed to an electric water pump fed by 150L of water on board. There is extra food preparation bench space that slides out from the end. For a quick stop, it's all self-supporting, but there is a drop-down leg for longer stops or when the wind picks up. There are two 12V outlets by the gas outlet and a handy fold-up 12V LED that lets you see exactly what you are doing when working in the kitchen. When packing up the kitchen, you'll need to remember to unplug the LED, as well as the gas lines.



SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The tent canvas rolls up, bringing the outside in when the weather is singing; Dropping down the dinette table and adjusting the cushions reveals an extra berth; The adjustable height table is ideal for family dinners; Carpeted storage pulls out on heavy duty rollers; Under-seat storage is well utilised; A divided cutlery drawer keeps things organised at camp.

Setting up for a quick overnighter takes only a few minutes, with the full annexe setup requiring another 15-20 minutes. The set up process is assisted by a wind-out winch but there are fiddly press studs involved. Not a deal breaker for me, but the windows have awnings held up by short poles, and they require little more work to get yourself ready to camp.

ADJUSTABLE INTERIOR

Entry to the camper is via permanently fixed and well thought-out steps that fold down from the rear of the door. The first thing you notice as you step inside is a six-seater dinette that sets itself apart from many other campers. While there are some who won't like it, there will be many who'll



love this setup. It's surprisingly roomy, with the entire judging panel comfortably accommodated

CTA RATES SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO

| | BORGY | STUPOT | BEAR | COOKIE |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 Suitability for intended purpose | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 2 Innovation | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 3 Self-sufficiency | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 4 Quality of finish | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 5 Build quality and construction | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 6 Bush-ability | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 7 Specifications and comforts | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 8 Ease of use | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 9 Value for money | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 10 X-factor | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |



during judging. The table height has been raised by 50mm which has made a big difference to the comfort levels.

Lots of options are now yours: you have a dining table, cards table, a lounge out of the weather or from a bug infestation and, for a quick overnight stop, you can drop it down to make a second double bed for the kids or to simply use as a place to retire for some 'me' time. Otherwise, you can remove the table to place the porta-cot for those with toddlers. It gives good internal living space for a trailer and is at a height that offers great vistas when opened right up. When the bugs and flies get too much, it can also be closed up with entry provided via a zip-operated door. A bug-resistant yellow LED for inside and over the kitchen would

be a good optional upgrade for me.

Given the nature of the forward fold, there isn't a heap of storage inside and what's there can't be accessed when it's all closed up. The only internal storage is underneath the dinette seats, which I would keep for those things you need to take but only rarely use like blankets or jackets. You can also throw your bags on the floor during travel.

The Dingo is not short on comforts; three LED strip lights provide plenty of light throughout and there is a light inside the fridge slide. The bed has a queen-size innerspring mattress, with a modesty screen for privacy and handy small canvas pockets either side of the bed for your glasses or phone. The package of 15oz canvas comes complete with all awning walls and floor including a tropical



SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO



COOKIE'S SAY:

Skamper Kampers has added lots of nice touches to an established design.

It appears to be sturdily built, roomy and well equipped. All the welds and fittings look good and the finish looks quite nice.

Skamper Kampers put the kitchen at the rear to help with the ball weight.

The Ark Extreme jockey wheel is good and so is the gas hot water, though it has to be set up each time.

It could do with more reading lights and power outlets at the bedhead.



BEAR'S SAY:

The Skamper Kampers Dingo is a well finished camper that's reasonably priced and comfortable.

Although it's not a new layout, it has been well thought-out with an ensuite, good slides and a great finish throughout, though not much in the way of storage.

In terms of self-sufficiency, it offers 150L water, two 100Ah AGM batteries, a hot water service and a CTEK charger – considering its price, it's quite self-sufficient. All that's needed is solar and DC-DC charger and it's all there!



SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO

RIGHT: A privacy screen separates the main bed from the dining area. **BELOW:** You can monitor your 12V and water supplies from the one point.

CTA SPECS

SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO HARD FLOOR

> TRAILER

Tare 1360kg
ATM 1900kg
Suspension Adjustable heavy duty coil suspension with dual shocks
Brakes 12in electric
Coupling McHitch Uniglide
Chassis 100x50x4mm
Drawbar 100x50x4mm
Body 1.5mm galvanised sheet with baked enamel paint finish
Wheel/tyre 265/70 R16 with Cooper AT tyres
Style Rear-fold hardfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 4250x4250mm
Length (hitch to tail lights) 5200mm
Tent 4250x4250mm

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x9kg holders
Water 150L
Cooktop Dometic three-burner stove
Kitchen Stainless steel
Battery 2x100Ah

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$20,000

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (02) 8316 1680

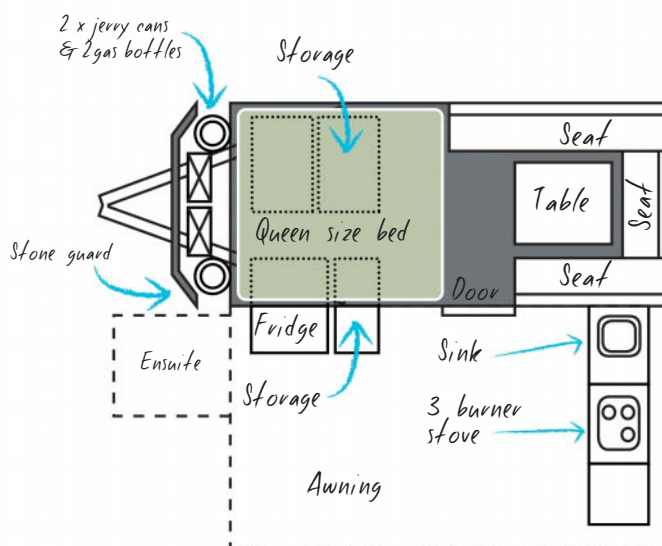
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- > Video test



roof, which is great value. An ensuite zips on to the front wall of the annexe where you can have a hot shower, courtesy of the portable gas unit provided, or some private space for the portalo, which is a critical part of the around-Oz trip for many travellers. Its position will appeal to some that like to have all the goings-on in one area, but others may prefer to have the shower or dunny set up behind the trailer, out of sight.

On the A-frame, you have a heap of big storage options on each side, including a large fridge slide





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SKAMPER KAMPERS DINGO

and pantry. It can carry two 20L jerries and even comes with room for two 9kg gas cylinders (wow!). On the flip side is the spot for your porta-potti and even more storage.

OFFROAD PERFORMANCE


Offroad and out in the scrub, this unit will get to most places you need to go. It's a well-built trailer with a one-piece, hot-dipped galvanised chassis. It's got very good ground clearance, a rear recovery point, 12in electric brakes, a stainless steel protected water tank and a McHitch Uniglide coupling to help get you through those steep washouts. Suspension is a solid independent type with coils and twin shock absorbers. Power for your 12V needs come from two 100Ah batteries. If you want to be out in the bush long enough to use your 18kg of gas, you'll need to upgrade to a DC-DC charger and solar, as charging currently comes via a small 7A mains charger only and an Anderson plug.

The Dingo, being 5.2m long from hitch to tail lights, is not perfect for tight three-point turns on a High Country track, especially with its 1360kg Tare. Once your water, gas, food, frothies and clothes are included, you'll most likely be pushing up towards the 1900kg ATM. So readers with smaller 4WDs will need to remember that, although you're

likely to get to 99 per cent of the spots you want to reach, you may need to drop a gear or two on hills.

THE VERDICT

Out on the tracks, the Dingo looks as though it would survive a few knocks but its turning circle is limited and its weight needs to be accounted for on sand and on steep descents.

Overall, it's a good all-round package for \$20K but it won't appeal to all given its limited internal storage. Whether you like a dinette or not will be the deciding factor for many. 



BELOW: The Dingo is just at home off the road than on it. **RIGHT:** The Dingo wears 16in wheels with Cooper AT tyres.





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TAIPAN AURIGA



STAR GAZING

TAIPAN BUILDS THE AURIGA REARFOLD ON A SOLID FOUNDATION.

PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



WORDS DAVID 'COOKIE' COOK



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Gull-wing doors provide easy access to the storage up front; Setting up the awning and tent requires a bit of manual labour but the result is impressive; Bash plates protect your water supply; The independent suspension is fitted with dual shocks; The welds in the undercarriage are tidy, with all the little bits tucked up out of the way.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > Good design and engineering
- > Self-supporting kitchen
- > Zip-out tent side
- > Good storage options
- > Large under-bed drawer

MISSES

- > Lacking in electrical capacity
- > Excessively complex pole and bar setup
- > Small stone shield
- > Bit heavy for offroading

The rise of internationally-sourced camper trailers in the past decade – particular those from China – has changed the face of the industry in Australia and, thus, the nature of those trailers has changed greatly as well.

There was a time when the description 'imported' represented for many compromised performance, needless complexity and poor material choice. But buyers expected more, so the marketplace responded and, while some crinkles are still present, the standard of workmanship in many models has improved greatly, at an increase in price as well.

The Taipan Auriga – named for a constellation of stars first documented by Ptolemy in the second century – is a recent arrival for the Brisbane-based company. It is a traditional hardfloor rear-fold camper. Sitting behind a tow vehicle, it's a handsome looking camper with a long drawbar, a deep gull-wing storage box at the front and plenty of side lockers. When it's set up for camp, it gives off the same aura.

It rides on a trailing arm independent suspension with dual shocks under a 100x50x3mm one-piece hot-dipped galvanised chassis. There is a set of 12in electric brakes, 16in six-stud alloy wheels with all-terrain tyres, a polyblock offroad hitch, and two spare wheels on a swing-away rear arm.

While underneath the Auriga, I noticed the 120L stainless steel water tank has a separate bash guard and that all the welds looked to be of reasonable quality with all the little bits tucked up out of the way.

The body is finished in a mid-grey baked enamel with stainless steel guards and dress fittings.

SELF-SUPPORTING KITCHEN

The kitchen is all stainless steel and is fully self-supporting, so there's no need to fiddle with supporting legs. The roomy Smev three-burner



TAIPAN AURIGA





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Auxiliary fuel and gas ride up front; The pull out kitchen is self-supporting; Everything is close at hand with the fridge and pull-out pantry opposite the cooktop and sink; The tropical roof opens out automatically when setting up; A winch assists the setup process; Poles for the tent ride in a dedicated compartment on the tailgate.

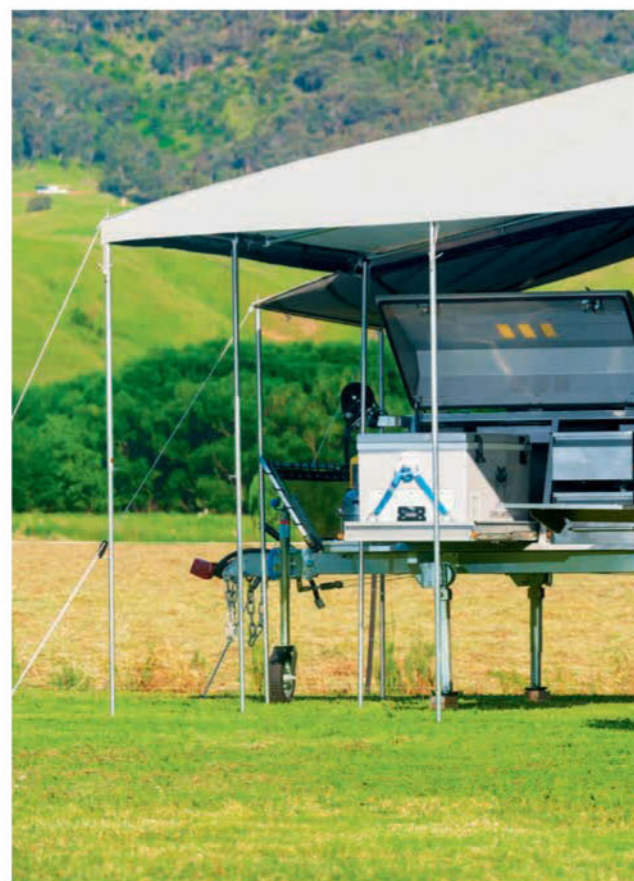
cooktop and stainless steel sink looked good and there is a generous fold-over extension to prepare food. Underneath are two drawers for cutlery and other kitchen items and, along the back, are two open bays for the piezoelectric stove starter and gas and water hoses.

The tap is electronic, activated by lifting the spout from within the sink. It's a neat idea in many respects but if your reserves are low, you'd need your kettle at the ready to minimise water loss.

There is a small round LED light in the kitchen but, being at bench level, you'd struggle to see into your saucepans, especially if it's partially concealed by the tent's canvas skirt. However, there are four light bars included in the Auriga's package and one of these could serve to illuminate the kitchen.

Next to the kitchen are two large drawers at the rear of the front gull-wing box which would serve as pantry, cookware and/or crockery storage. In front of them is a sturdy fridge slide with solid tie-down points capable of holding up to an 85L Evakool or 80L Waeco fridge. There are filtered vents on the two gull-wing doors but, while these will keep out dust, they really need a fan or similar on the inside to effectively pump out the heat.

Gas comes from either of the two 4.5kg gas



CTA RATES TAIPAN AURIGA

| | BORGY | STUPOT | BEAR | COOKIE |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 Suitability for intended purpose | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 2 Innovation | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 3 Self-sufficiency | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 4 Quality of finish | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 5 Build quality and construction | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 6 Bush-ability | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 7 Specifications and comforts | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 8 Ease of use | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 9 Value for money | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 10 X-factor | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |



cylinders at the front, either side of the jerry can holder. This can carry four jerries but if you want to carry three or less, you'll either have to strap them in or pad it out with empty jerries as there aren't any individual slots.

In front of these and the gull-wing front box is a stoneguard that looks a bit small in size and could do with mud flaps at the outer ends to protect the lower edges of the box and its fittings. I also wonder whether the laced-in netting would survive an onslaught of stones on a long stretch of gibbers.

The driver's side of the gull-wing box has



TAIPAN AURIGA



STUPOT'S SAY:

The Auriga is a good looking unit that's ready to roll with enough room to make packing for a weekend trip a breeze. The low charging capabilities of modern alternators will impact its battery grunt, so a battery and DC-DC chargers would be useful optional extras.

The cook can work between the fridge and the deep two-drawer pantry which makes good sense. It's also fitted with an extra fold-out benchtop, two cutlery drawers, a three-burner Smev, and sink with electric pump fed from the onboard 120L of water.



BORGY'S SAY:

The Auriga hardfloor has a solid one-piece chassis with solid latches and hinges throughout, especially the ones for the floor. The kitchen hinges are strong and it's self-suspending.

The full independent suspension looks solid with good size tyres and an average departure angle. The clearance isn't bad but it's getting a bit on the heavy side for the tougher tracks.

The tent is decent quality but there are gaps, especially between the hard floor and the camper body. The tropical roof is automatic, so it's easy to erect.



TAIPAN AURIGA

RIGHT: Storage pockets are located halfway up the mattress for access when you're out of bed. **BELOW:** There's lift-up and drawer access to the storage hub under the bed.

CTA SPECS

TAIPAN AURIGA

> TRAILER

Tare 1450kg
ATM 1950kg
Suspension Trailing arm double shocks with coils
Brakes 12in electric drum
Coupling Poly-block
Chassis 100x50x3mm one-piece hot-dip galvanised
Drawbar 100x50x3mm one-piece hot-dip galvanised
Body Zincaneal
Wheel/tyre 116x8in six-stud alloy rims with 165/70 R16 all terrain tyres
Style Rear-fold, hardfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 3400x1740mm
Length (hitch to tail lights) 5300mm
Tent 4400x1740mm

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x4.5kg
Water 120L
Cooktop Smev three-burner
Kitchen Stainless steel pull-out
Battery 3x100Ah AGM

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$20,000 (excluding fridge)

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (07) 3171 1894

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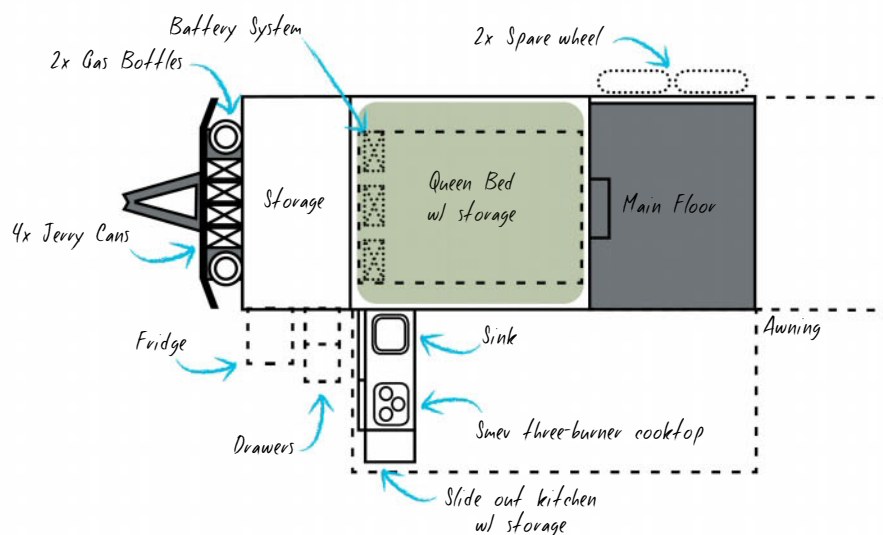
> More pictures
 > Specs to compare
 > Video test



two roomy drawers on slides that would carry canvas, a generator, porta-potti or other camp necessities.

There are two small storage lockers along the driver's side of the camper, the front one filled with the electronic controls and fuses and a voltmeter, the rear one half occupied with the water filler for the tank. I would prefer to see this fitted to the camper side to free up the space in this locker as storage space is always precious in a rear-fold camper.

There was an additional small storage locker at the rear, on the kitchen side.



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SYNTHETIC

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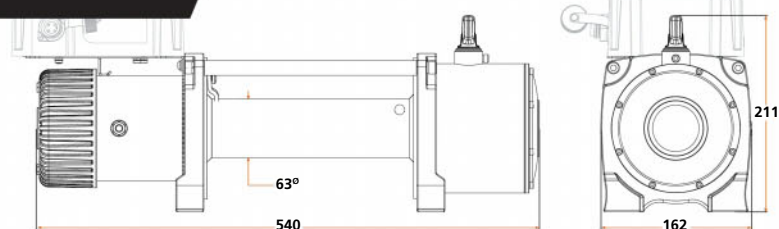
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Mounting Bolt Pattern: 254 x 114.3mm (20.8" x 6.34" x 7.86")

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| | | | | |
|--------------------------|------|-------------------|-----|-------------------|
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| Performance of 1st layer | | | | |
| Line Pull | | Line Speed | | Motor Current 12V |
| lbs | kgs | fpm | mpm | amp |
| 0 | 0 | 21.0 | 6.4 | 86 |
| 2000 | 910 | 11.0 | 3.4 | 150 |
| 4000 | 1810 | 8.8 | 2.7 | 205 |
| 6000 | 2720 | 7.5 | 2.3 | 235 |
| 8000 | 3630 | 6.0 | 1.8 | 252 |
| 9500 | 4310 | 5.6 | 1.7 | 300 |

TORQ 12,000LB SYNTHETIC

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|------|-------------------|-----|-------------------|
| Gear Ratio | | 294:1 | | |
| Gear Train | | 3-Stage Planetary | | |
| Performance of 1st layer | | | | |
| Line Pull | | Line Speed 12V | | Motor Current 12V |
| lbs | kgs | fpm | mpm | amp |
| 0 | 0 | 16.4 | 5.0 | 85 |
| 4000 | 1810 | 8.8 | 2.7 | 160 |
| 6000 | 2720 | 7.5 | 2.3 | 191 |
| 8000 | 3630 | 6.7 | 2.0 | 235 |
| 10000 | 4540 | 5.6 | 1.7 | 270 |
| 12000 | 5440 | 4.9 | 1.5 | 300 |

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TAIPAN AURIGA



TOP: The Auriga come with three 100Ah batteries but no efficient way to charge them.

ABOVE: One of the four included light bars; this one is in the bedroom area.

The Auriga presented here comes with three 100Ah AGM batteries but, electrically, it doesn't take full advantage of these generous reserves. The bank is charged by an Anderson plug wired with 8mm cable and there are no mains or DC-DC chargers.

On close inspection, the battery supply on the demonstration camper, towed by an Isuzu D-Max, arrived at Dargo down on charge. Modern low voltage alternators typically struggle to recharge camper batteries on their own, especially through 8mm cable, and the Taipan representatives were keen to hear our thoughts on the matter.

TENT

The tent is made of 14.8oz cross-weave canvas roof and walls, with a handy tropical roof included. It comes complete with a full wall set, draft skirt and awning floor, but not ensuite or kids' rooms, even as options.

The Auriga is a hardfloor design and comes with a winch to assist with the set up procedure. Once open, you adjust the three internal hood bows, four internal spreader bars and two rear vertical bars, which is straightforward enough for an overnight camp. To set up the awning, however, there are another 14 spreader bars as well as nine tent poles, plus two poles under each of the window awnings. That's a lot of poles and bars impacting the time it takes you to set up camp.

Once set up, you can zip out the main tent wall from under the awning for an open airy feel.

All the poles travel in a box, accessible from either end, across the back of the swing-away spare wheel carrier. The box hinges down for access to the wheels.

Internally, there is a storage area that's

accessible either by a large deep drawer under the bed or by lifting the strut-assisted bed base with the foam queen-size mattress on top. This is particularly handy if you have bunks opposite the bed and can't reach the full depths of the drawer. A fold-down rear door provides an access point to this area when the camper is closed up. To illuminate the sleeping quarters, one of the aforementioned light bars will do the job, although negotiations might result if you plan to read when your partner wants to go to bed. Private reading lights would definitely work better here.

There are two handy pockets midway along the bed for storing small items, but I'd like to some near the bed-head storage as well.

To close the tent, you need to remove or collapse the tent spreaders and bows first, then push out and hook up the winch, lift the floor waist high to flex the line of tension under 180° and then winch over the floor. The winch keeps the load off the tent bows, but you can still close over the floor without it, if you prefer.

All of this adds up to a very solid Tare weight of 1450kg, though the 90kg ball weight was certainly light enough and well below all its opposition. It also has a load capacity of 500kg for a gross weight of 1950kg.

THE VERDICT

The Taipan Auriga is a well put together rear-fold camper that would benefit from a few electrical upgrades and a simpler setup with respect to bars and poles.

If you dropped one of the spare wheels to lighten the load you'd be on your way to an excellent camper. And, at a price of \$20,000, it is a lot of camper for the dollars. **OTA**

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LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT WHAT MAKES THE WINNER OF THE CAMPER TRAILER OF THE YEAR 2016 BUDGET CATEGORY TICK.

PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



**MDC VENTURER LT
CAPE YORK EDITION**





WORDS MICHAEL 'BORGY' BORG



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The solar panel keeps you self-sufficient in comfort for longer; There's a five-year warranty on the drawbar and chassis; The coil and quad shock suspension performed well out on the High Country tracks; The kit packs in a fair amount of luxuries on a mid-length drawbar, for manoeuvrability on and offroad.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > Unbeatable value for money
- > Boat rack with built-in solar panel
- > Tent wall opens out to the annexe

MISSES

- > Ball weight is excessive
- > Simple flip-over tent, but still needs several pole adjustments
- > Bed is quite high so you need to climb into it

Camping is all about getting out there and exploring this beautiful country of ours with friends and family, but riddle me this – when did camping become so expensive? Sure, our camper trailers are more luxurious these days, but does that mean we need to fork out an arm, leg and a second mortgage in order to have a well set up camper trailer? Well, the guys at Market Direct Campers don't seem to think so and, after seeing the value for money they've stuffed into their Venturer LT (Cape York Edition), I believe them. They've built the Venturer LT (Cape York Edition) to be a totally self-sufficient, go-absolutely-anywhere camper, jam-packed with just about every gizmo and gadget you could think of but, more amazingly, they've got it on the market and available to the average Joe for the astonishingly low price of \$19,990. Yep, this thing's got the lot for less than \$20K! In fact, we were so surprised with the number of features MDC squeezed into this camper for the price that we even sought written confirmation from MDC themselves. MDC



categorically assured us the price is, in fact, 100 per cent correct. Amazing! So, with that in mind, let's take a closer look.

SOLID START

As I mentioned earlier, the whole idea of the Venturer LT (Cape York Edition) is to allow the average family to travel to those remote, and often hard to reach, locations with all the luxuries we've



**MDC VENTURER LT
CAPE YORK EDITION**





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hoses from the water tank are plumbed to the hot water system, it's simply a matter of plugging it all in; A checkerplate toolbox rides up front; Kitchen comforts are close at hand; The tropical roof opens out automatically; Cook in comfort and shade under the awning; The inset sink minimises splash and mess when the burners are on; Bench extensions on the pull out kitchen allow two cooks to work simultaneously.

come to expect. In order to do that, the Ventureur LT needs to be strong right from the get go, and that begins with the 100x50x3mm hot-dip galvanised chassis. It's as solid as a rock with good quality welds and a proven, track-tested design. In fact, MDC backs its chassis enough to offer a five-year structural chassis and drawbar warranty; now that's good by anyone's standard.

Absorbing all of those harsh corrugations is the full independent trailing arm suspension complete with twin shock absorbers. In all seriousness, the trailing arms are that bulky it looks over-engineered, but better to be safe than sorry, eh? Plus there are also 12in electric offroad brakes and a set of 265/75 R16 mud-terrain tyres. So in a nutshell, it's built to follow you anywhere!

ELECTRICAL POWERHOUSE

I was blown away by the amount of goodies the folks at MDC have managed to stuff into this thing, but let's start with the basics. The Ventureur LT (Cape York Edition) is powered by two 100Ah batteries, which can be charged using several methods. The IDC25 12/24V 25A Projecta 'Intelli-Charge' DC-DC charger is the brains of the outfit, and basically manages the charge received by your vehicle's alternator, 240V mains power or the 120W solar panel cleverly mounted on the boat

rack as standard. Accessing the power is easy with six 12V outlets strategically mounted around the camper, with two USB points and two 240V outlets to top it all off. There's also LED lighting throughout and a Powertech 1000W inverter to top it all off. Geez, talk about the whole kit and caboodle, eh? To add more punch, there's even a complete Fusion marine-grade sound system, so those campfire tunes are handy at the flick of the switch.

CTA RATES MDC VENTURER

| | BORGY | STUPOT | BEAR | COOKIE |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 Suitability for intended purpose | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 2 Innovation | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 3 Self-sufficiency | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 4 Quality of finish | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 5 Build quality and construction | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 6 Bush-ability | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 7 Specifications and comforts | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 8 Ease of use | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 9 Value for money | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 10 X-factor | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |



Now I know what you're thinking – they must compromise on quality to offer all these features at this price, right? Well, let's squash that thought right now. The wiring harness is a professional looking job, with well-known brands used in the fit-out. The only thing you'll need that's not supplied as standard in this setup is a fridge but, let's face it, chances are you'll either already have one, or want to choose one that suits you, anyway.

THE COMFORTS OF HOME

Gone are the days of the old blow-up camping mattress, at least they are for all MDC Venturer LT owners anyway. The mattress of choice is a queen-size 120mm innerspring, which is really up there in terms of comfort. Next on the list is a full gas hot water shower system, included in that

\$19,990 price tag. It's a Country Comfort instant hot water system rated at 6L per minute, which means it's not permanently mounted, but it's fairly simple to set up and operate. It helps that the hoses are pre-plumbed from the water tank to the front of the camper, so it's a simple plug-and-play type of deal. Plus, the full ensuite/shower tent finishes it all off nicely, too.

There's an automatic 12V water pump, so there's water at the turn of the knob, and, when it comes to cooking, it wouldn't surprise me if you'd choose the camper's kitchen over your own home's kitchen either. Who wouldn't, with a well laid out stainless steel kitchen made from high-grade stainless steel, which sits on a set of sturdy runners at a comfortable and easily manageable height? The stove itself is a classy



MDC VENTURER LT CAPE YORK EDITION



COOKIE'S SAY:

The MDC Venturer LT (Cape York Edition) is a well setup camper. It has everything there for an offroad tourer.

There are a lot of inclusions, like the boat rack, solar panel and gas hot water. The fact the solar panel mount is on the boat rack and the gas is permanently plumbed is good.

I also like the design of the kitchen area, all working from the front and the five year structural warranty is good.

To be honest, I've always been a bit wary of imported campers but I have to say I was impressed by the MDC Venturer Cape York Edition.



BEAR'S SAY:

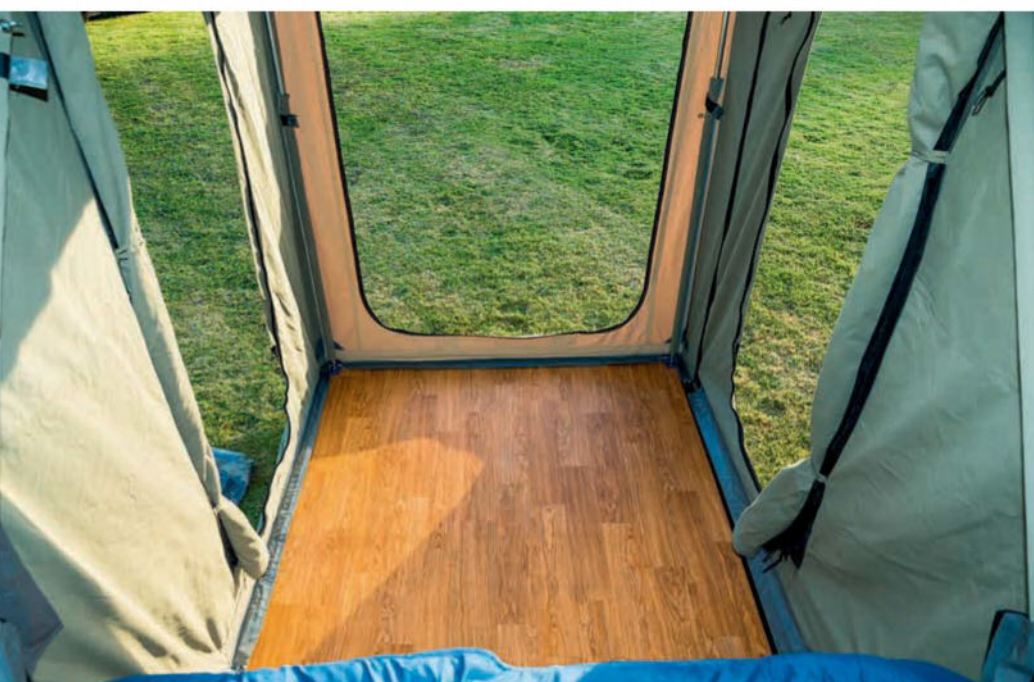
The MDC Venturer LT Cape York Edition has an unbelievable array of smart accessories riding on a good strong base.

At 1340kg Tare, it will be quite heavy in the bush, so it will need horsepower but all the goodies will keep you comfy and self-sustained.

The drawer tracks are quite good, too, the kitchen is great and the day awning is a very good idea.

It's probably the best value camper I have ever seen presented!

MDC VENTURER LT CAPE YORK EDITION



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A 12in innerspring mattress helps ease those track-acquired aches; Access to fuses completes the Venturer LT (Cape York Edition) electrics setup, which includes a Powertech inverter and the new Projecta IDC25 battery and DC-DC charger; The flat, raised floor is easy to clean and provides comfort underfoot.

looking four-burner, the sink is full sized and the overall design of the kitchen unit is practical, plus it allows for a bucket load of storage. There's also a full pantry unit so there's heaps of room to stock up on supplies for the whole family on those longer stints. Plus, there's even a full-size slide-out bench too; how's that for premium bench space, eh?

LET'S TALK LAYOUT

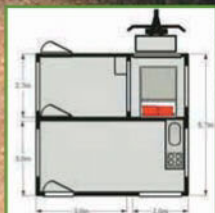
Let me start by saying this camper has had plenty of hours put into the layout and design side of

things, and I'd be lying if I said it didn't show. Everything is where it should be. I mean, it's things like the fridge being close to the kitchen, and the storage drawers under the bed being at an easy-to-reach height that make all the difference. The spare wheel is simple to get to and the lights are exactly where they need to be but, just as importantly, turning them on doesn't involve a nightly game of hide and seek!

Canvas-wise, we're looking at a 16oz close weave material with double stitching throughout. The tent itself is a neat yet fairly practical layout with plenty of ventilation thanks to three windows and three doors all with midge-proof netting. The annexe is massive, and what I like about the tent's sidewall design is you can roll up the side of the main tent so the annexe becomes a part of the main tent, like one big room. This is a great feature for young families as you can keep a closer eye on the young fellas. Admittedly, there's a fair bit

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MDC VENTURER LT CAPE YORK EDITION

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Three doors provide access into the tent; Roadside drawer access to your gear; The solar panel remains attached to the boat rack for ease of use and as an added deterrent to would-be thieves.



CTA SPECS

MDC
VENTURER LT CAPE YORK EDITION

> TRAILER

Tare 1340kg
ATM 2000kg
Suspension Independent trailing arm with coils
Brakes 12in electric offroad
Coupling Poly-block offroad hitch
Chassis 100x50x3mm RHS (hot-dip galvanised)
Drawbar 120x50x3mm RHS (hot-dip galvanised)
Body Zincalume
Wheel/tyre 265/75R16 mud-terrain on alloy rims
Style Rear-fold hardfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 2100x1800x725mm
Length (hitch to tail lights) 5000mm
Tent size 5000x1800mm (plus 3800x2400mm for the annexe)

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x4kg holders
Water 110L stainless steel tank
Cooktop Thetford four-burner
Kitchen Stainless steel (304 grade)
Battery 2x100Ah deep-cycle

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$19,990 (excluding fridge)

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (07) 3085 2802

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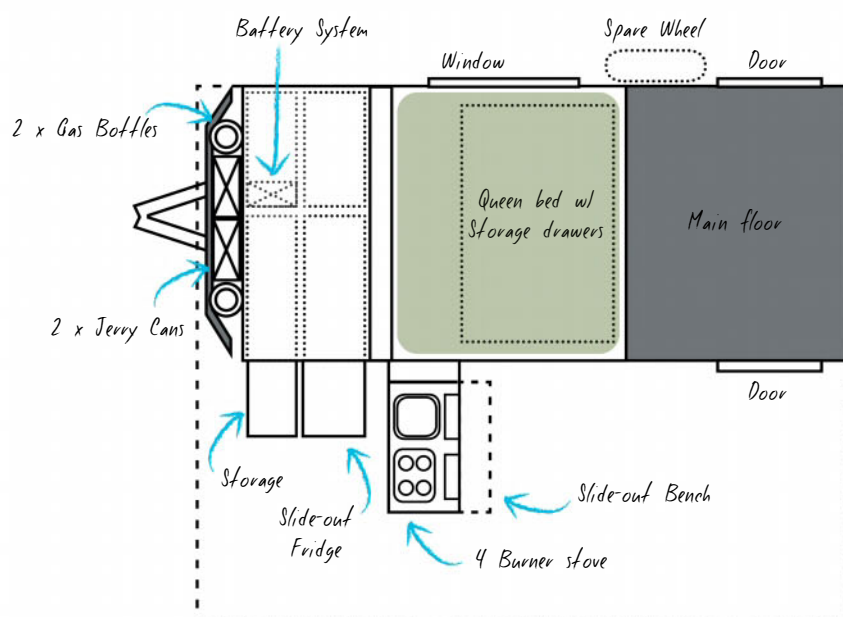
of setting up if you're going all-out with it, but let's face it, if you're sticking around for a week or two, it's well worth the effort.

THE VERDICT

Like I said, it's not every day you come across a camper that's completely set up with quality gear for less than \$20K. Sure, with 185kg of weight on the tow ball and a Tare of 1340kg, it's a bit on

the heavy side but, realistically, that's what you get with most hardfloor campers these days, especially if they're loaded with more accessories than you can poke a stick at.

MDC has come a long way in terms of quality and true value for money over the years, and the Venturer LT (Cape York Edition) is testament to that. It's finished off extremely well, uses quality gear throughout and has obviously been designed, set up and improved by real camping enthusiasts. It really is an all-in-one package that's hard to fault, and for just \$19,990, it's a bloody good deal! **CTA**





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PICS NATHAN JACOBS AND MATT FEHLBERG



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BUILT FOR THAT BIG AUSSIE ADVENTURE, LET'S TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ALL-NEW RUBICON.

PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



TAMBO RUBICON





WORDS MICHAEL 'BORG' BORG



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Tambo worked with Vanguard to develop a suspension optimised for the Rubicon; The stoneguard wraps around to protect the checkerplate front box and the spare; Fitted with muddies, the Rubicon handled the crossings and high country tracks with ease; Tambo has allocated almost 800kg for your water stores and gear, so utilising all of that available internal space is not a problem; The swing up jockey wheel takes up little space on the A-frame and is easy to use.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > High quality tent
- > Very solid construction
- > Heaps of clearance

MISSSES

- > Jockey wheel mount hangs low
- > Water tank drain valve is vulnerable

If you're thinking about upgrading to a tougher sort of camper trailer that's capable of tackling the 'Big Lap', you'll want something that's reliable and durable enough to get the job done without question. After taking a closer look at the Rubicon from Tambo Campers, I'm happy to say that this really is one such camper. It's a bit old-school in design, but it just oozes that no-bull, rugged charm that's becoming a bit hard to find these days. If you ask me, it slightly resembles a Sherman tank! But don't let its hardy exterior fool you; it has evolved into a very comfortable and well thought out bit of gear, making it ideal for those larger, family-based expeditions. With that in mind, let's take a closer look at the Tambo Rubicon.

RIGHT HEIGHT

Make no mistake, the Rubicon is all business. There's more ground clearance than a monster truck on 'roids. Okay, so maybe I'm

exaggerating just a tad but you get the point. The only thing that can really get hung up on the tracks is the jockey wheel mount. The mounting bracket hangs a bit low, making it by far the first point of contact but, to be honest, there's not much alternative given the height of the camper, and you'd be doing well to bottom it out either way.

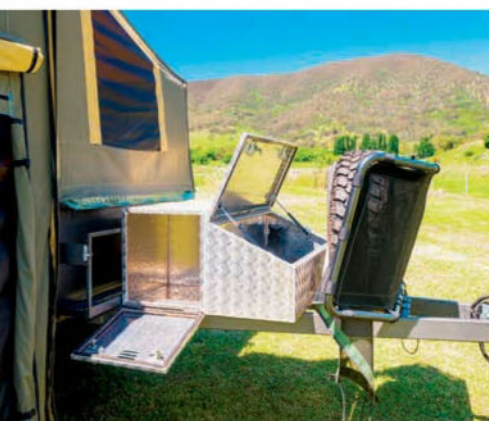
A quality set of alloy rims coupled with the 265/75 R16 full mud-terrain tyres gives the Rubicon plenty of stance, traction and durability on the tracks, and there are also 12in offroad electric brakes to help keep things under control on those steep hills, like on our test run in the High Country.

The chassis looks as tough as guts with plenty of bracing for extra strength and a 100x50x4mm RHS drawbar, which has been proven time and time again in offroad camper trailers all over the world. The Tambo runs full independent suspension, which is actually made by Vanguard specifically for Tambo.



TAMBO RUBICON





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A tough, proven Treg poly-block hitch reduces noise and facilitates comfortable towing offroad; The Aussie canvas tent is beautifully sewn and opens out with top-notched zips; The 40L Ironman 4x4 fridge is close at hand, under the awning; The attractive kitchen features a Lido two-burner stove and a nifty portable sink; The two 120Ah AGM batteries are topped up en route with a CTEK DC-DC charger; Gas supplies are protected out on the tracks; There's room for four jerry cans to augment that 85L water tank or for fuel reserves for your 4WDing adventures – you choose.

The body is finished off with your everyday edge prime and two thick coats of enamel. Plus, there's also a good-sized stoneguard on the front that keeps everything well protected.

So we've established that the bare bones of the Tambo are rock solid but, to be honest, it's the little things that prove these camper trailers are built by real enthusiasts for real-world camping – including the under-body stoneguard, which protects the suspension trailing arms from stone damage. The front stoneguard design is very practical, and allows you to access the spare wheel very easily. I

wasn't entirely rapt with the rear under-body water tank having the drain valve in such a vulnerable position but, realistically, it's an easy fix, and something I'm sure Tambo will get on to pretty quickly.

CORE STRENGTH

The tent on the Rubicon is really impressive. It's made from 12.1oz Australian core-spun premium canvas, but straight away you can tell it's all about quality and durability. The zippers are solid and sturdy, the flyscreens are midge-proof, and the way it's all constructed,

CTA RATES TAMBO RUBICON

| | BORGY | STUPOT | BEAR | COOKIE |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 Suitability for intended purpose | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 2 Innovation | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 3 Self-sufficiency | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 4 Quality of finish | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 5 Build quality and construction | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 6 Bush-ability | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 7 Specifications and comforts | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 8 Ease of use | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |
| 9 Value for money | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★★★ |
| 10 X-factor | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ |



it just feels like something you'll be passing on to your kids. The actual design of the tent and frame has been well thought-out as well. I'm particularly impressed with the amount of headroom you've got over the full-size queen bed, which is all thanks to the vertical pole design for the end wall over the bed. There's also a clear PVC window on the end wall, and a generous PVC travel cover for the tent.

Ventilation is maximised by six separate windows and two doors, and you'll find the tent's size is a good compromise between

ample living space without making it too big and bulky for the average couple to handle..

PACKING A PUNCH

The Rubicon really packs a punch in terms of standard features. For example, it comes with a 40L Ironman 4x4 fridge on a solid 1200mm fridge slide. It sits next to the powder-coated slide-out kitchen along with the stainless steel bench extension, which really completes the entire kitchen package. Layout-wise, the kitchen works well. Although the fridge could



TAMBO RUBICON



BEAR'S SAY:

The Rubicon will go everywhere an expressive unit will go and has the build quality to last a long distance over many years and bumpy trails.

Tambo has spent time perfecting a great product for a very low purchase price. It comprises a rudimentary kitchen and a small fridge. But still, a fridge in a \$21,000 camper trailer is a bonus.

All in all, the Rubicon is a basic but quality camper which represents excellent value for money.



STU'S SAY:

The Aussie-made Tambo Rubicon is great entry-level camper. The 10ft floor allows room for your bags and bunks for the kids with space to move around.

The functional kitchen only has a hand pump but the lift-out plastic sink can double as a baby bath. Offroad capable, it comes with a Treg hitch, Vanguard suspension with Terrain Tamer shocks and a stoneguard.

A great and reliable family favourite, I reckon

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: The taut, high tent is made in the traditional way to minimise water ingress out in the bush; The side-fold configuration maximises internal space; The main storage hub is accessible from under the mattress, and to reach its depths; You can also get at it from the other side, even when the tent's set up. Pretty nifty; This small nook ideal for personal items is accessible from within the tent or when parked for the day; Compression locks ensure those items are kept secure and squeaky clean no matter how muddy your adventures.



CTA SPECS

TAMBO RUBICON

> TRAILER

Tare 1120kg
ATM 2000kg
Suspension Vanguard independent
Brakes 12in electric offroad
Coupling Treg offroad
Chassis One-piece DuraGal 100x50x4mm RHS
Drawbar One-piece DuraGal 100x50x4mm RHS
Body Steel
Wheel/tyre Six stud 16in alloy rims with 265/75 R16 mud-terrain tyres
Style Side-fold softfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 2300x1800x570mm
Length (hitch to tail lights) 4800mm
Tent size 3000x2400mm

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x4.5kg
Water 85L poly tank with hand pump
Cooktop Two-burner with grill
Kitchen Powder-coated with fridge
Battery 2x100Ah AGM

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$20,990

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (03) 9998 1681

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get a little tricky to access when there are too many chefs in the kitchen. That brings us to the cooking side of things, which is left up to the Italian Lido junior two-burner stove, complete with a grill. Gas is supplied by way of two 4.5kg gas cylinders located safe and sound in their own storage locker, which is a more than adequate supply for the 'Big Lap', if you ask me.

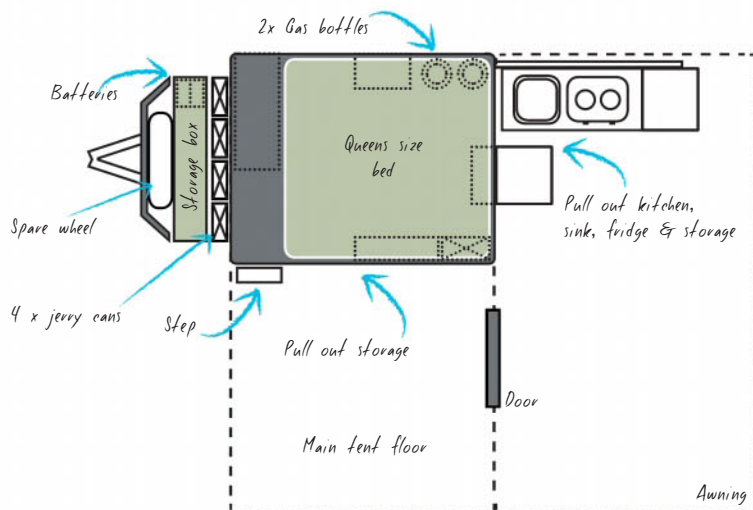
Electrically speaking, the Rubicon sports an AGM deep-cycle battery complete with its own slide-out tray to make access for maintenance a cinch. It's charged by a DC-DC charging unit and pumps power to two 12V outlets and three LED map lights.

The Rubicon doesn't come with an electric water pump as standard, which I thought was a little odd. But water is easily accessed from the 85L poly water tank by a simple hand pump, which means the chance of an electric failure hindering access to your water is gone. The pump does require you to hook up the hose when you're setting up, but it's a simple, two-second job.



STORAGE KING

There is no shortage of storage in the Rubicon but, more importantly, it's very accessible storage that's on offer. The front half of the trailer tub is one big storage compartment which is easily accessible by a door on each side. You can also get in there through the top if you tilt the tent up. The tent is on gas struts, which makes it a lot easier to raise the lid. On top of that, there are several storage compartments around the outside of the camper along with a good-sized






TAMBO RUBICON



storage box on the drawbar, too.

THE VERDICT

Rugged, reliable and enduring are the words that spring to mind to sum up the Tambo Rubicon. In a nutshell, it's a good old-fashioned camper that's been built to stand the test of time. Resale for these campers is right up there, which is testament to the longevity the brand produces, and if you like to carry plenty of gear on that big adventure, the Rubicon has plenty of payload capacity for that.

So, if you're after a go-anywhere camper that'll probably outlast you, have a closer look at the Rubicon from Tambo. It's sure to impress! 







PATRIOT X1



Patriot GAMES

PATRIOT'S X1 CONTINUES TO IMPRESS WITH ITS COMFORTS, OFFROAD ACUMEN AND LIGHTWEIGHT TARE. PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



WORDS DAVID 'COOKIE' COOK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Light and full of features, the X1 Limited Edition performs beautifully offroad; The D035 coupling is a proven performer; Cooking appliances are easy to access at camp. Airbags provide excellent driver comfort on and offroad.

MEASURING UP

HITS

- > Great design and engineering
- > Comprehensive fine tuning of all areas
- > Improved stability
- > Light weight with all comforts
- > Great new tent

MISSSES

- > Lacking plumbed hot water at the sink

When we first met the Patriot X1 at the 2014 Camper Trailer of the Year (CTOTY) awards, what blew all the judges away was the comprehensive nature of the design and the quality of the finish. And the camper had only been on the market for three months. Getting to that standard of finish and detailed complexity is usually the result of a decade or more of evolution and work. Not surprisingly, it won its category easily.

Then last year, in Broken Hill, NSW, for CTOTY 2015, it showed up again and we expected maybe a handful of upgrades to the already well-packaged version we saw the year before. We got a list of upgrades covering two A4-pages and we were simply blown away. Again, it cleared its category with ease.

And now we've met the X1 again, in Dargo, Vic, for CTOTY 2016, as a Limited Edition version, again with a long list of upgrades and it's got even better.

This time around, though, the changes weren't all in the detail. We saw structural modifications that materially improved the camper on the road and in camp, as well as many minor touches adding up to a comprehensive upgrade.

NO BULL

Most significantly, the camper's chassis has been redesigned. It is now 150mm wider in the track, to match a Prado or HiLux, and it's been lowered 50mm. Together with some changes around the top of the trailer (the top panel, for example, made from a honeycomb aluminium, weighs just 7kg), the centre of gravity has been lowered 32 per cent. The new chassis is built to the same high standards from laser cut and CNC-machined materials and is all hot-dip galvanised. It comes with a recovery point at the rear, which can also be used as a bike carrier receiver.

And if you want an unreserved testimony to the strength of the Patriot chassis, while on one of the 4WD tracks at Dargo, we came to an extremely steep hill. It was shaly, with lots of loose rock and dirt and several vehicles and trailers had great difficulty in getting to the top, having to make several attempts. The Patriot team, still with the X1 on the back of one of their own LC200 SuperTourers, with close to 1000ft/lb of torque, backed down and hooked up a stranded Isuzu D-Max with a camper on the back to the X1 and hauled it up the hill as if it was nothing.

The spare wheel which was once an option is now standard on the X1, and the once-optional swing-away arm has been braced to alleviate stress points that were present in the past.

The wider chassis, however, doesn't come with a wider body, which stays at its previous huge 1800L of storage capacity. The extra chassis has enabled the addition of rear steps with grip tape adjacent to the two rear wet/dirty area storage cages and wider guards.

The airbag suspension (with compressor) is still an option, but Patriot tells us 60 per cent of customers now specify this.

ALL SEWN UP

Also, significantly, there is a totally new tent. The old Howling Moon roof-topper has been replaced with a purpose-designed integrated tent, sewn by Howling Moon from 385gsm ripstop canvas. It still rides on the top and still requires access via a ladder, but it is now bigger and roomier and is designed to fit in with the camper's side and the wrap-around awning, and can be extended into a roomy kids' room at the back.

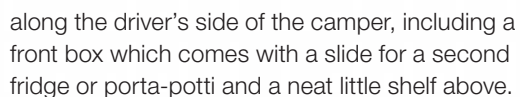
However, for those who might prefer it, the original roof-topper tents are still an option.

The bed size has gone from 1.8x2.4m to



PATRIOT X1





The tent itself has a zip-out floor, there's shoe and toy storage pockets along the drop wall, and the optional kids' room extension zips on in just a couple of minutes. To complete the picture, there's an optional canvas extension to the gull-wing awning to keep you under cover right to the door of the tent. The mesh flooring, finished to size, is optional.

The electrical system has also been upgraded, with a move to the Redarc Manager30 30A battery management system. It incorporates a 30A mains smart charger, 30A DC-DC charger, 30A MPPT solar regulator and includes its own comprehensive battery monitoring system. It has nice touches such as the lithium battery profile and a capacity for multiple concurrent sources with a solar preference, so it takes what it can from your solar input first, and tops up what it determines the batteries' need from the alternator, to minimise wear and tear on the alternator and improve fuel consumption. The batteries have also been

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Storage is a highlight in this featherweight champion; The benchtop serves double duty as a storage portal; Zips on the windows travel on a continuous track; The burners are shielded from weather and well-spaced for medium-size pots; The wrap-around awning provides excellent under cover area.

a standard king-size 1.8x2.1m high density foam, now up to 120mm thick. The ladder now incorporates a hand rail which might ease the concerns of some who are wary of climbing in or out of bed in the dark, especially after a convivial time around the campfire. Once you're in bed, you get a great 'star gazer' roof so you can drop off as the night sky sweeps by.

The tent, which drops down from the camper top, gives better access to the storage bays

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relocated to in front of the rear drawers, ahead of the axle centreline for added stability and increased storage space in the right-hand box.

You also get a 350W pure sine wave inverter as standard but this can be optioned up to pretty much whatever you like.

In addition to the above, the electrical system also includes Korrr LED lights throughout and four 12V plugs (cigarette and Merit).

In the past, the mains input into the camper was in a locker, requiring a door to be left open overnight if in a campground. It's now been shifted to just in front of the kitchen-side guard so that you can close it up at night or while away from the camper and leave it attached to mains power.

The drawer system in the back of the X1 has also been reconfigured in line with customer desires, now with one shallower full-width drawer rather than last year's two deep drawers, one above the other. This opens up the space above for more creative stacking options.

WIND OF CHANGE

As I said, there have been a number of small changes made to the camper as well. For example, the stove, which slides out on to the kitchen bench, now has a wind break. It was a bit 'clunky' in the review camper, but we are told it would be streamlined immediately when the crew got home to Queensland.

The two-burner and griller stove is now also on a gas strut which prevents the stove from accidentally being bumped back into its nook while you're cooking.

Fridge options include up to an ARB 60L, Evakool 60L or a Waeco 50L. The water is a standard two 70L tanks, which you can fill together but operate separately.

The kitchen is, as in the past, made from a special 304-grade stainless steel designed especially for the food catering industry, which ensures minimum retention of bacteria and long-term good looks.

The body of the camper has now also been pressurised. Although dust hasn't been a problem in the past for the Patriot X1, the filtered air intake at the front has increased its defence, allowing a sufficient entry of air while moving forward to keep the interior air pressure slightly higher than outside.

The front storage box also now has two small vents for safer transport of auxiliary fuel.

TICK OF APPROVAL

And speaking of the front storage box, this is now home to what may possibly be the most popular of the options to the X1. If selected, the chainsaw tray in the front box goes (a loss that some might feel) but it is replaced by a flexible extension arm with an end mount for a Weber Baby Q barbecue that's likely to get a big tick from just about everybody. You don't get the barbecue, though we'd imagine Patriot would be happy enough to provide one if you asked. Oh, and there's an optional front extension to the gull-wing awning to shelter the Weber to make it all-weather usable.

To make the Weber more useful, one of the Patriot's few weak links – the single 4.5kg gas cylinder – has now been remedied, with a second cylinder as standard.

The front box will still carry two 20L jerry cans plus other items even with the Weber.

The hot water service – a Smarttek 6 instant gas system – now hangs on the driver's side from the front locker door, where it is permanently mounted. Simply open the door fully and the heater unit is



PATRIOT X1



BEAR'S SAY:

Justin just doesn't know when to stop! A widened track width, lowered centre of gravity, vacuum seal, 30A BMS, swing out Weber and the honeycomb alloy bed base... the list goes on.

The Patriot X1 ranks high in bush-ability with a tropical roof, Howling Moon canvas, Vehicle Components independent suspension with airbags, only 840kg Tare, 1200kg ATM, 60L fridge, and only 1.7m wide and 3.2m long, making it very manoeuvrable.

It's also a real Queenslander with a lot of verandah!



STUPOT'S SAY:

If you love your offroad travel and you want something that's tough, well-equipped, with quality components, well thought out and looks great, then quit looking – here's your baby.

So much thought has gone into this year's model and, as a result of customer feedback, it's now a real softfloor with more canvas including the zip-on kids' room.

For a tough, blokey unit, it's well-appointed in the comfort stakes, too! It brains it in bush-ability and self-sufficiency is also what you'd expect.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: There's a larger canvas area, with more room for kids on the floor; The main bed is now larger at a standard 'King' size; The X1 is truly at home hitched up and heading offroad.

CTA SPECS

**PATRIOT CAMPERS
X1 LIMITED EDITION**

> TRAILER

Tare 840kg
ATM 1200kg
Suspension Trailing arm double shock
Brakes 10in electric drum
Coupling D035
Chassis Interlocked hot-dip galvanised
Drawbar Interlocked hot-dip galvanised
Body Aluminium
Wheel/tyre ROH alloy rims with 285/75 R16 mud terrain tyres
Style Side-fold softfloor

> DIMENSIONS

Box size 1700x3200mm
Length (hitch to tail lights) 3220mm
Tent size 1400x700mm on camper top, 1400x1400mm on ground

> ACCESSORIES

Gas cylinders 2x4.5kg
Water 2x70L
Cooktop Two-burner plus grill
Kitchen 304 stainless steel
Battery 2x120Ah AGM and Redarc 1230 battery manager

> PRICE AS SHOWN

\$43,278

> ENQUIRIES

To enquire about this camper, visit www.campertraileraustralia.com.au/spec or phone (07) 3085 2803

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located right next to the tent and ready to connect the shower unit to a shower tent. Hot water is not available to the sink through the standard tap, it is taken separately directly from the heater unit via an extended hose.

The old alloy wheels have also gone, with Patriot now opting for Australian made ROH alloys.

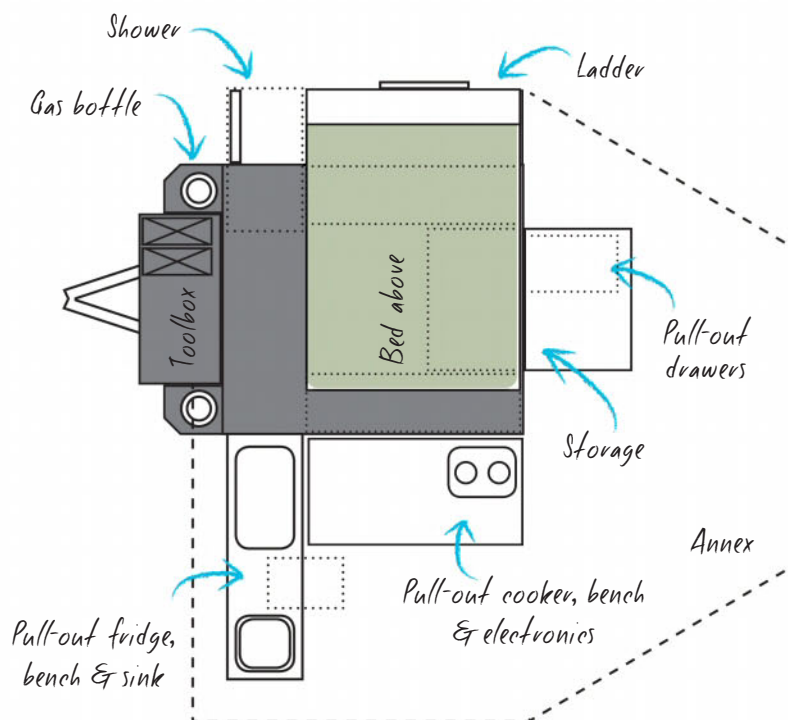
COLOUR CODES

Though of less significance but certainly of greater visual impact is the colour change. You can still buy the X1 in 'Patriot Green', but you also have the choice of white or graphite, the former of which really makes it stand out. There is also the option

now to colour match any standard vehicle colour, for an extra cost.

Also in the appearance category come laser cut decals. The old stick-on tags had a habit of being torn off in tight scrub country, so Patriot overcame this with new laser-finished labels that certainly fit in with the image of this high-tech and finely finished camper.

For an overnighter, the X1 requires just two poles and four pegs plus guy ropes and poles on the kids' room. For the complete setup, with the Supa-Peg gullwing awning, the tent with a kids' room and awning extensions at each end, the setup time is about 20 minutes, with a couple of





PATRIOT X1



minutes to drop the roof-top tent for an overnighter and seconds to access the kitchen or fridge.

The modular design permits retrofitting of older models with newer components as they are developed, which has increasingly become an important part of Patriot's market in the past year.


"I think we've about done the X1 concept," Patriot's Justin Montesalvo said, as we finished our judging assessment. "I can't think of much more we might want to incorporate and maybe it's time to divert our energies to other dreams."

Wanna bet me that there's a better than even chance that the Patriot X1 will be back in 2017, bigger and better than ever, and with another huge list of improvements? I just don't think that Justin and wife Sarah can help themselves.

THE VERDICT

At 840kg Tare, with a 1200kg gross weight, and with a ball weight of just 90kg, the X1 is a pretty light package for all that you get.

With a five-year structural and canvas warranty, and at a price, as we saw it, of \$40,990 excluding the airbags, fridge and solar, it's no wonder that Patriot X1s are now to be seen in New Zealand, the USA, England and Dubai and are selling in increasing and satisfying numbers in Australia.

And it's no wonder that the Patriot X1 Limited Edition has earned accolades in Camper Trailer of the Year for the third straight year. 



A silver Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4 is shown from a side-front perspective, driving on a dirt road. The vehicle has a roof rack and a spare tire mounted on the side. A fallen log is in the foreground, partially blocking the road. The background is a dense forest with green foliage.

Power and the **PASSION**

TJM'S ENDURING SUCCESS STORY HAS BEEN MODELLED ON TRUST, PRIDE AND ADVENTURE. PICS MATT FEHLBERG AND NATHAN JACOBS



TJM PROFILE





WORDS DAVID 'COOKIE' COOK



Back in the 70s when 4WDs were few and far between, three adventure-seeking mates got their 'offroad thrills' with customised Volkswagen Beetles modified as beach buggies. Each was fitted with custom-made bullbars, roll bars and sand tyres and they drew the attention of friends and bystanders. Before long, Lloyd Taylor, Cliff Jones and Steve Mollenhauer were making hand-made custom bars for a growing number of fans. As the demand continued to grow, they decided it was time to get serious.

In 1973, with little more than their combined initials, shared passion and appreciation for quality products, TJM was founded and the rest is history. They were pioneers and TJM became one of the first companies in Australia to manufacture and distribute high quality 4WD equipment.

TJM's product range has grown extensively to include steel and alloy bullbars, nudge bars, side and rear protection bars, side steps,

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The TJM crew take pleasure in scaling the High Country roads; Airtec Snorkels have drain holes in the ram to expel rain water with the flow of air; TJM Bullbars stem back to the 70s; The TJM Rear Step Tow Bar protects your fourbie's rear panels and provides access to your gear up top.



trade racks, roof racks, recovery equipment, winches, XGS suspension, Airtec snorkels, Pro Lockers and roof-top tents and awnings.

While TJM has grown to be a sophisticated operation, it has never forgotten the key elements that resulted in the formation of the brand: trust, from the quality of manufacturing; pride, in innovative designs; and adventure, daring to head out from suburbia and experiencing the wonders of our unique and breathtaking country.

TJM is a natural partner for the Camper Trailer of the Year competition and was there to support the industry's leading celebration of some of the best camper trailer designs and applications.

TJM RECOVERY JACK

If you don't own a hi-lift jack you're not serious about offroading.

Well, that might be a bit of a tough definition, but a hi-lift jack is a mighty handy solution to some serious potential recovery problems.

A TJM Recovery Jack provides a means of lifting the vehicle in almost any terrain, where the use of a more conventional jack is prohibited by uneven ground, deep holes or excessive clearance issues, the latter a not uncommon issue with tow rigs with raised suspension/body lifts.

A hi-lift jack can be used in all manner of creative ways. Use it to break the bead on a tyre which needs replacing or repair by placing the base on the edge of a tyre, against the rim,



and jacking against the load of your front bar. Use it as a hand winch to drag the vehicle off or out of an obstacle by attaching a cable at each end.

The TJM Recovery Jack has a working load limit of 1000kg, can raise up to 1120mm (44in) and will drop to a low point of just 150mm (6in). It fits directly into the T-slot Recovery Points unique to TJM Bullbars without any additional attachments. It has a cast column jacking mechanism, unique rubber jack keeper and comes with its own recovery jack bag.

With a RRP of \$131.24 it's not going to break the bank, and the first time it gets you out of a mess out on a track somewhere, you'll admit that it was a real bargain.



ABOVE: The TJM Recovery Jack has a working limit of 1000kg. **TOP:** It locks straight into a T-slot Recovery Point on a TJM Bullbar, no attachments required.



or on a full-blown expedition in the outback there will be times when you could do with a TJM Air Compressor.

And now TJM has released an improved model of its popular Air Compressor, with the pressure gauge relocated from the compressor unit to the hose send for enhanced accuracy of pressure readouts and to make it easier to monitor tyre pressures at the tyre without having to move the unit around.

The 72L per minute maximum airflow enables tyres to be quickly inflated no matter where you are, and it comes with an easily removed 7.2m 'quick connect' rubber hose with a brass air valve connector. The compressor unit has a heavy duty sand tray to keep it clear of grit and foreign matter, and it has a rugged easy-store carry bag that can be packed into your vehicle's luggage space without damaging upholstery, ready for easy retrieval whenever you need it.

The unit draws 30A, has a maximum working pressure of 120psi and maximum restart pressure of 150psi. It will operate between -55°C and 60°C, has an automatic thermal cut-off switch to prevent overheating and weighs 5.5kg.

The compressor can be permanently mounted and hard-wired if desired and it comes with a generous five-year Australia-wide guarantee.

The improved TJM Air Compressor has a RRP of \$175.

TJM RECOVERY KITS

It was late afternoon, the cloud was heavy and threatened rain at any minute when we reached the bottom of a steep, shaly hill. The first camper and its tow vehicle took a good run at it and got halfway up before the wheels started to scrabble helplessly. They backed cautiously down and took another run, getting no further. Again, they backed down and we all sat while tyre pressures were lowered further and, again, they had a shot at it. With onlookers urging them on the sliding, tyre-spinning, the struggling combo finally made it up around the corner at the top.

The next couple of tow vehicles and campers scrabbled for traction and momentum but, with the forewarning, had their tyre pressures sorted before they started and enough throttle to get them over the top. The Patriot team, with their relatively light X1 Limited Edition camper behind their mighty LC200 SuperTourer, seemed to do it with ease. Then the next camper and its Isuzu D-Max tow car combo scrabbled to a halt, highway-terrain tyres spinning helplessly on the loose shale.

It was getting dark, rain threatened, and if we got any water on this stuff, everyone down the bottom would be stranded there, there would be no more getting up this hill on this day.



TOP: The TJM Air Compressor has a maximum airflow rate of 72L per minute, which makes a difference when you're dealing with six tyres late in the day.

ABOVE: TJM recovery gear is well regarded among 4WDers.

TJM AIR COMPRESSOR

TJM's Air Compressor has been proven to be a real boon to anyone who enjoys the use of their vehicle, anywhere, any time. Whether you're driving around town, on a quiet weekend away,



TJM PROFILE



When the TJM team's 4WD couldn't get past to assist on the narrow track, the only other option seemed to be to bring that Patriot with extended wheelbase SuperTourer back down the hill. Without even unhooking the camper, they backed down, and as they came down the slope, out came the TJM recovery kit.

This was going to be real world testing of the sponsor's products in the toughest possible way.

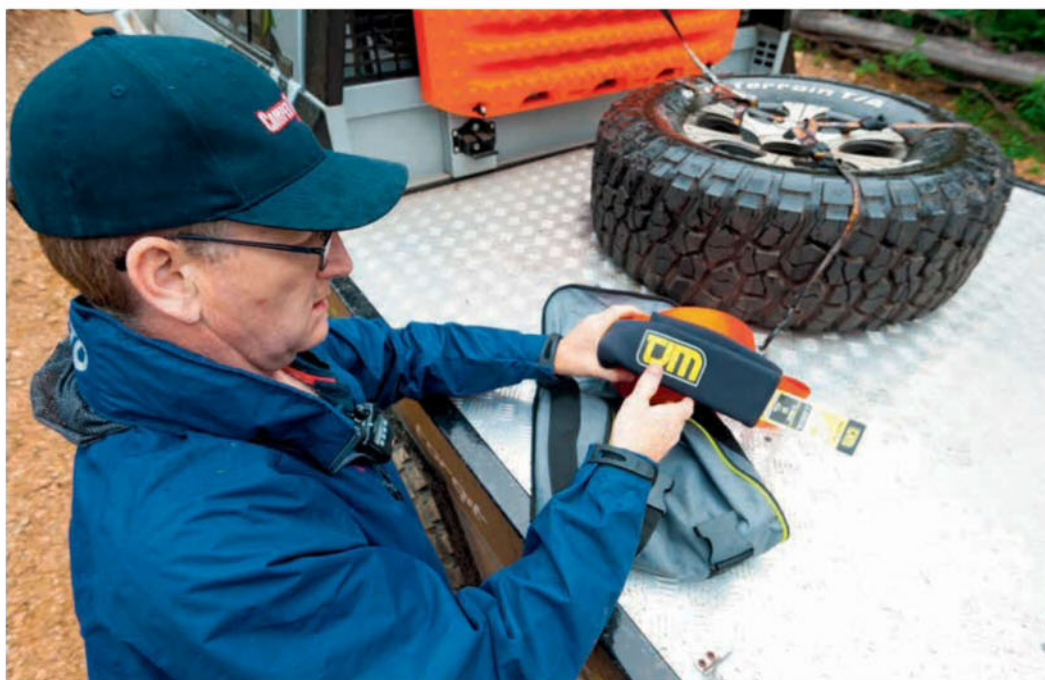
An 11,000kg-rated TJM snatch strap was attached to the SuperTourer, an 8000kg-rated TJM snatch strap was attached to the two front recovery points with TJM shackles, to ensure the pulling point would be central, and a large TJM shackle secured the end of the main snatch strap. The big LC200 took up the strain and then away it went, roaring, scrabbling, clawing its way up a hill that was steep enough to make it difficult to walk, with 1.5t of camper and 3t of dual cab ute on the back.

No sweat...


TJM produces three recovery kits, and you shouldn't be heading off into the bush without at least one of them.

The TJM Heavy Duty Recovery Kit includes a 9m 11,000kg-rated snatch strap, 20m 6000kg-rated winch extension strap, 5m 10,000kg-rated tree trunk protector, 8000kg-rated snatch block, two 19mm bow shackles, two 16mm bow shackles, heavy duty recovery gloves and a recovery blanket. With a RRP of \$177.69 it's well worth having.

The TJM Large Recovery Kit includes a 9m 8000kg-rated snatch strap, 20m 4000kg-rated winch extension strap, 3m 8000kg-rated tree



trunk protector, 8000kg-rated snatch block, two 19mm bow shackles, heavy duty recovery gloves and a recovery blanket. As long as you don't want to be hauling dual cab ute and camper trailer combos up steep hills this will answer for just about all your recovery needs, with a RRP of \$318.15.

For those with lighter load demands there is the TJM Snatch Strap Kit. Included is a 9m 8000kg-rated snatch strap, two 16mm bow shackles and heavy duty recovery gloves, it will handle all your needs in mud or sand when a stout pull on the snatch strap is what you need to get someone out of trouble. RRP is \$123.54. 

TOP: A TJM shackle was used to connect two TJM snatch straps out on the tracks.

ABOVE: Stuart 'Stupot' Jones inspects the gear prior to it being put to use.



Max and Ethan Taylor take five after a long drive to the Dargo River Inn in the Victorian High Country.



DARGO RIVER
INN

Freedom FINDER

THERE'S A SENSE OF PEACE, AND ESCAPE FROM THE
WIDER WORLD, AT THE DARGO RIVER INN.

WORDS JOHN 'BEAR' WILLIS PICS MATT FEHLBERG, NATHAN JACOBS AND ELLEN DEWAR





“The Dargo River Inn makes a terrific base for exploration, or just putting the feet up to wash out the cobwebs of modern living”

“Find your freedom”. What an apt description of life at the Dargo River Inn. Dargo is a jewel in the crown of the Victorian High Country and what better way to explore its fruits than from the hospitality of the inn.

There's a gentle feel to Dargo, even though it's a town where excitement begins. Dargo is nestled in a magnificent river valley bordered on all sides by the majestic rolling hills and steep slopes of the Great Divide. It stands alone as a civilised outpost – but none too civilised that it hasn't lost its history. It's a town that was built before the race was run by rats, and men and women felt the lure of the mountains in search of its treasures, yet still had the time and inclination to simply stop and smell the roses (well, maybe the eucalypts in this case).

Dargo has a rich history dating back to the early gold rush days. While there was some gold locally, the township served mainly as a base for prospectors seeking their fortunes in the surrounding regions. There are still those that visit Dargo with the lure of finding that elusive nugget; however, its primary attraction is the natural riches of the surrounding mountains, streams and wildlife.

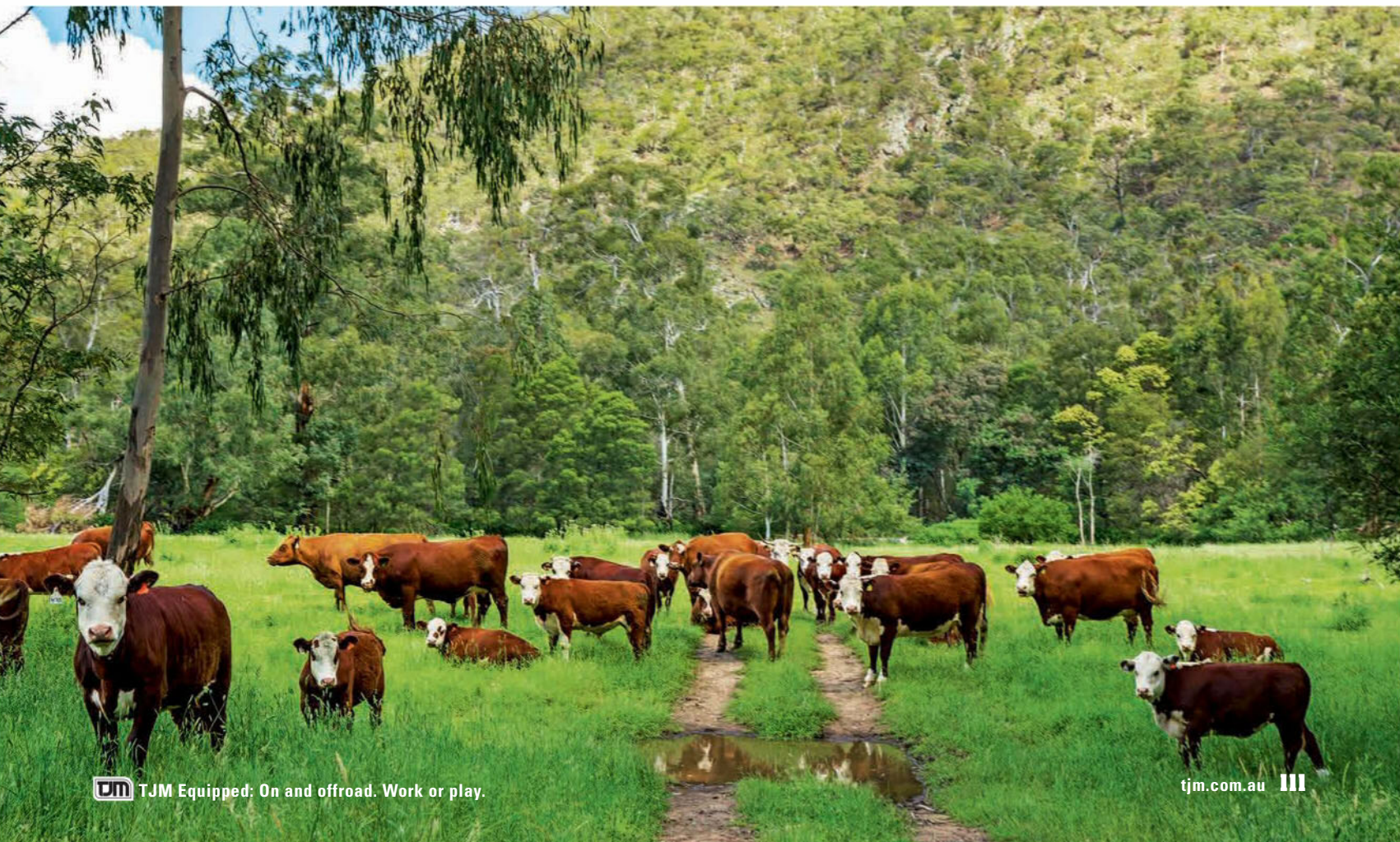
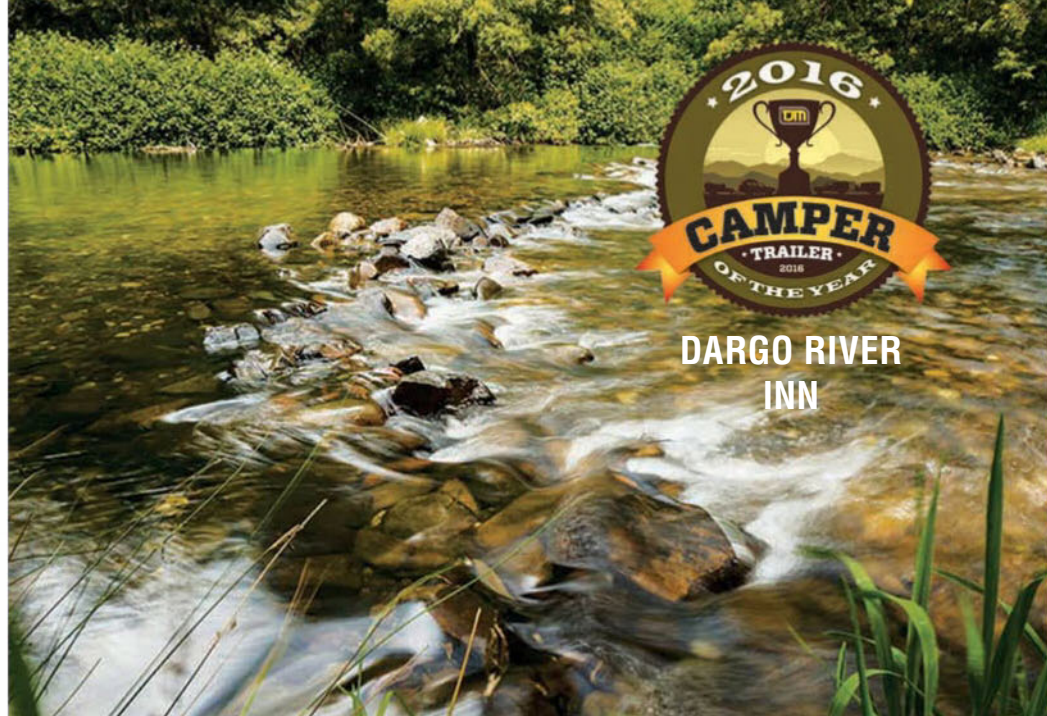
‘PEACE’ DE RESISTANCE

This is a township that happily coexists with kangaroos in the main street, wombats on the roadsides, deer in the hills, wedge-tails overhead and trout in the streams. The river flat is simply breathtaking and the sun reflects the natural hues in glimmering displays of natural accents. It's a place where you can feel at peace, leaving the outside world behind.

Dargo is also a town of excitement. It is a base for visiting trail bike riders (utilising both motorised and pedal power) who enjoy the challenges and serenity of the surrounding hills and valleys as well as those of the Alpine National Park, Avon Wilderness Park and Mitchell River National Park. There's trout in them there streams! Hence, it's a great place to cast a line, particularly for fly flickers who can wade for many miles through the gently bubbling tailraces of the Dargo and Wonnangatta rivers and tributaries.

Dargo is known for its groves of century-old walnut trees that line the valley floor. Many High Country cattlemen have homes in the stockbreeding and agricultural district and the area is rich with the history of the still thriving timber industry. Visit Wonnangatta Station by

CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: The picturesque scenery belies the gruelling nature of its terrain; The bubbling Dargo River is a thing of beauty; Kicking back in the beer garden, enjoying the majestic surrounds; Cattle farming is one of the cornerstone industries for the Dargo community; The High Country is a haven for trail bike riders.





4WD, once Victoria's most remote cattle station. There's kayaking, rafting, hunting, horse riding, hiking and some of the most challenging offroad 4WD adventures in the country, or you can sedately take in the serenity of a remote rural community – plus its views, history, people, flora and fauna.

CLEARING THE COBWEBS

The Dargo River Inn makes a terrific base for exploration, or just putting the feet up to blow away the cobwebs of modern living. It takes around an hour and a quarter to reach Dargo off the Princes Highway either coming from Stratford to the west or Bairnsdale to the east. It's a beautiful drive starting in the foothills grazing country and then winding up through the thickly forested mountains to reach the remote township with its estimated population of just 150.

Situated on the outer edge of the township as you enter from the south, the Dargo River Inn is not to be confused with the famous Dargo pub which is further up the road and a must-stop while you're in town. The inn is set on six acres in a flat grassy valley bordered



DARGO RIVER INN



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Our CTOTY convoy took over the Dargo River Inn, in search of the ultimate Aussie parma; Breathtaking views of the High Country are uninterrupted from the beer garden on the six acre property; The bustling bar is a great place to relax; You won't go thirsty here!; Throw a coin on the table and take your chances, ladies and gentlemen, that Bear is a shark!

by steep mountains. Step out of the car and breathe the fresh air as it fills your lungs with unadulterated and refreshing oxygen and unique country smells. Park the car, bike or horse out the front and be greeted by a warm and rustic atmosphere in the main bar and the hospitality of new owners Christian and Marissa Barrett, a lovely young couple who will go out of their way to ensure your stay is comfortable and entertaining, or maybe just secluded and private if you want it that way.

Have a talk to the locals at the bar; there's

great tales in every one of them.

Have a game of pool, a beer, a wine or something heavier, or just enjoy the calming ambience of the big wood heater thawing your bones on a cold Victorian winter's day. It's a cool place to while away the hours in air-conditioned comfort around the bar with friends when the mercury starts to rise, or head outside to the abundant beer garden and lose yourself in the magnificent scenery with a fresh cold beer off the tap, or maybe sample the local wines.



DARGO RIVER INN



TOP: Peace and tranquillity at its best.

ABOVE: The Dargo River Inn has four clean and neat self-contained cabins but there is camping and bunk-style accommodation as well.

PARMA KARMA

Why bother with the cooking when you can enjoy the hearty offerings of this marvellous country inn and the comfort of the relaxing dining room. There's a full menu all cooked to perfection with loving care, but don't forget to try their good old Aussie parma – especially the one with a Mexican twist with guacamole, sour cream and jalapenos for a really tasty sensation.

What a great place for a wedding, that special birthday, family gathering or maybe just a romantic getaway for two. There are four fully self-contained cabins and another with bunk-style accommodation for a larger group.

They all have kitchen and cooking facilities and feature a large fridge in each – not just a useless bar fridge! The cabins are clean, neat, tidy, warm, cool and comfortable and all feature separate living areas and large balconies so you can entertain your own party with an outdoor barbecue.

Costs start at a very reasonable \$60 per person/night, with a minimum charge of \$110 per cabin/night.

The lawn area is well maintained, flat and well drained, ideal for pitching a tent, camper trailer, caravan, or perhaps a whole jamboree! There are independent toilet and shower facilities for campers, topped up with extra portables for peak demand periods like New Year's Eve when the pub brings in bands and entertainment. There are also special nights throughout the year, so log into their website or social media and make a date for their next event.

The Barretts say, "Turn up Friday night and make the most of the area. Saturday morning kick off with one of our famous big brekkies, ride all day and return to an ice cold one from the bar and a hearty meal." Now that's an invitation too hard to refuse!

The Dargo River Inn is located at 13 Lower Dargo Road, Dargo. You can reach Christian and Marissa Barrett at the Dargo River Inn on (03) 5140 1330 or by email at info@dargoriverinn.com.au. For more information, visit www.dargoriverinn.com.au or search Dargo River Inn on Facebook. 

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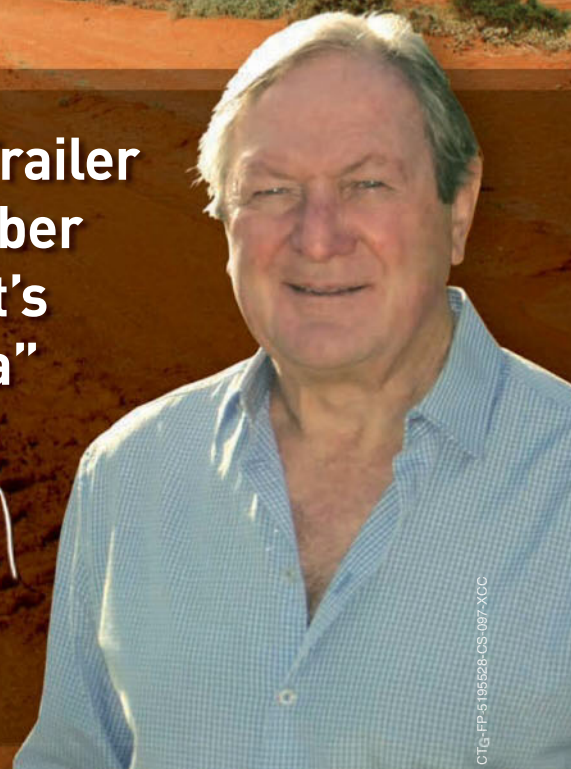
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LIKE-MINDED SOULS

BEAR HEARS FIRST-HAND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO TRAVEL IN COMFORT AT AN AOR OWNERS' MEET AT FRY'S HUT, VIC. WORDS JOHN 'BEAR' WILLIS PICS JOHN 'BEAR' WILLIS AND ROBERT HENDRY

Historic Frys Hut is nestled in a picturesque, grassy river flat in the Victorian High Country, with the bubbling headwaters of the Howqua River completing an almost perfect campsite. It's a stone's throw from the snowfields of Mount Buller, with crisp mountain mornings giving way to sunny days and brilliant, star-filled skies through the billowing smoke of roaring open fires. This is a destination that teases the senses with magnificent views, the smells of the bush and crispy bacon, the gentle tumble of a mountain stream, a myriad of birdlife singing their sweet tunes, roos and wombats merrily grazing on the green fields, the chill of an early morning frost and the warmth of a sun-filled sky.

Frys Hut is a fitting place to hold the annual Australian Off Road (AOR) Campers jamboree, where a large assembly of proud camper owners gathers for a week of fun, relaxation and offroad excitement.



A HOMELY WELCOME

I first met the organisers, John and Annie Robinson, a few weeks earlier across the hills at Dargo, when the enchanting couple represented AOR at the 2016 Camper Trailer of the Year event. They brought their own AOR Quantum and showed its strong offroad credentials on a gruelling High Country circuit. Back at camp, the Quantum blossomed with its gentle demeanour providing extremely high levels of facility and comfort in a beautifully presented and well-equipped package.

John and Annie live in Bright and the High Country is their home, hence, Frys Flat in the Howqua Hills, not far from Merrijig, was the obvious destination. I found them to be exceptionally lovely people; however, after spending a weekend with other AOR owners, I came to the conclusion that such appealing characters are endemic to the brand.

This year's annual get-together brought more than 40 AOR campers to Frys Flat;



each presented by happy customers with marvellous tales of personal adventures in their own respective models. There were Quantum, Matrix, Aurora and Odyssey models galore surrounding a central marquee and huge inviting bonfires that attract campers like bees to a honey pot.

I sat around the campfire on the first night talking with David from Manly, NSW – a keen beach and rock fisherman who just loves the convenience of travelling with his Quantum. He has towed it all over the country pursuing his outdoor passion. Camped next door to me were Will and Melissa, who now live in Canberra, ACT, but have travelled the wilds of Western Australia in the comfort of their own AOR Quantum.

There was Glenda and Neil from Melbourne,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Happy campers send a shout-out to the camera; Frys Flat easily accommodated more than 40 AOR campers; Chris and Marie Taylor spared a moment to say g'day before tucking into a warm, hearty dinner; The Quantum is a hugely popular model; AOR enthusiasts hit the High Country tracks; beautiful birdlife is prolific in this area.

with their three-year-old Matrix, who had just returned from their last trip through Adelaide, on to Alice Springs, Darwin and Litchfield and Kakadu national parks, across the Savannah Highway to Cairns and then home via the Queensland Coast. Their favourite spot was Carnarvon Gorge but they just loved Lorella Springs.

Helga and Douglas from Melbourne popped



in to join us and I asked the group what was their favourite part of the AOR camper? “The ensuite!” was the unanimous reply.

Helga went on to tell me that they had progressed from travelling with an Oztent to the Matrix and were amazed by how much more camping they are enticed to do with a comfortable AOR, especially with the added warmth of the diesel-powered heater.

“We come up into these foothills of the snowfields during the winter months and enjoy the place virtually alone. It has amazed me how much more we enjoy our travels with the Matrix,” she said.

When I asked the same question of a large group around the campfire and their common reply was that their AORs gave them great towing confidence being no wider than their towing vehicles.

“All we have to worry about is the air-conditioner up top but we wouldn’t give that up for quids!” said Douglas.

“We will come back to Frys Flat in the winter and use it for a base for our other great love of snow skiing,” he added.

OUTBACK ENDURANCE

Every owner had magnificent travel tales to tell in their respective AORs. Many commented on how well the AORs performed on the miles of heavy corrugations that are common all over this huge country.

John and Pam from Inverloch, Vic, shared their exploits from their latest trip to Cape York, then on to the Pilbara, down the west coast through the Central Road, Broken Hill to Cairns – including a jackknife incident on the Bloomfield Track which resulted in virtually no damage other than a slightly bent stoneguard.

I also spoke with Deborah and Gary from Sydney, NSW, whose last trip took them down the New South Wales coast, through the High Country to Cobram, to Adelaide and the Eyre





Peninsula, Nullarbor, Kalgoorlie, Margaret River, Albany, Esperance and back across the Great Central Road through Kata Tjuta and Uluru. The couple, who towed their camper with a 200 Series LandCruiser, said their favourite destination was the Margaret River area of Western Australia.

The other common love was the ease of setup when you finally arrive after a big day on the road, or the fact that you have such easy access for a road-side break, meal or rest.

Many people feel a little unsure, and perhaps a tiny bit scared, to take off by themselves on extended trips around Australia so I asked a large group of owners if they had ever had trouble on the road. I was amazed with all of the

shaking heads saying 'never'.

"You're never alone," Pam said, although many confessed that back-to-base GPS and Personal Locator Beacons eased their minds when out in remote regions.

There was an amazing feel to the whole weekend with owners coming from as far as Queensland and South Australia to join the festivities. John estimated that there was about \$4.8m in campers and \$4m in vehicles in attendance – a mightily impressive figure. This was the third such annual gathering and from the overall response, it won't be the last.

SNAP HAPPY

Photography is a primary interest to many

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Three hikers enjoy a High Country stroll; The Howqua River; Discussions continued into the night; Happy Hour kicks off to a fine start; Event host John Robinson shares his 'backyard' with a friendly mob; Melissa from Canberra prepares pancakes in her Quantum camp kitchen.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: This AOR Odyssey feeling right at home in the High Country dirt; Moni the Aussie shepherd had a ball and so did her friend Bear; Memories are made of this: the breathtaking spread at site 34; Al Stevenson outside his AOR Aurora shares some of his most breathtaking memories on the photoboard; Sandra Corbett comes with a warning!

travellers, and equipment tips are a hot topic for discussion. A drone buzzed above the campfire, giving a new professionalism to the sacred road-trip flick. John and Annie hosted a photographic competition, at the suggestion of keen photographers Rob and Peggy Hendry, and I ended up being invited to judge. There were some magnificent displays of on- and offroad exploits, wildlife, destination and landscape photography captured en-route. Two prizes were offered with one for the best set of six images as voted by all of the campers, and another for the overall best image which I got to judge! The concept was a social success, as every attendee got to visit every other camper to view the exhibitions under their annexes. It didn't take long for the campers start talking about their favourite destinations and experiences interspersed with handy traveller tips.

The winners were announced at a 'Pirates' Dinner' on the Saturday night when everyone brought a plate, and I'm pleased to say that I wasn't strung from the nearest branch for my final photographic selection!

ADVENTURES

For every AOR owner, there's also a 4WD and the campfire stories are full of tales of adventure. The morning calm is scattered with pockets of chatter about cars, campers, destinations and personalised fit-outs and ideas. Team leader John was up early to light the campfire and boil the billy for that important first coffee, as others were bustling around preparing for yet another day of adventure. There were groups tackling some of the regions more extreme 4WDing, others simply touring or bushwalking in groups, while some of the more sedate simply preferred a lazy day in comfort with a group of like-minded friends.

It's each to their own with the campers as well, ranging from AOR's old-school hardfloor campers, right through to the magnificent, award-winning hybrids.

The camaraderie of this event is terrific and the hospitality warming. This is the place where long-term friendships are forged and travelling companions meet to make plans for

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FEATURE



ABOVE: The owners of this Quantum Super Camper catch rays while they can, as High Country weather changes at a whim.

LEFT: Frys Hut was just a stroll from the campsite.

their next sojourn. It's also a great place to share knowledge with those of similar interests playing with gizmos and gadgets, cameras, fishing gear and exchanging their own experiences of products that make life on the road all the more successful. All in all, the AOR owners' gathering was a refreshing success and a hearty congratulations goes out to all who attended – and a big Bear hug to boot!

Visit www.australianoffroad.com.au for more information on AOR or parkweb.vic.gov.au for information on Frys Flat. 



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The Edith River plunges over the
Upper Falls.



Edenic PARADISE

ANCIENT EDITH FALLS, OR 'LELIYN', IS AN IDYLIC PLACE FOR SWIMMING. BUT PLEASE RESPECT THE RAINBOW SERPENT.

WORDS AND PICS CHRIS WHITELAW



TOP: A view of the Upper Falls from the Leliyn Trail. **ABOVE:** Red-winged parrots frequent the trees around the camp.

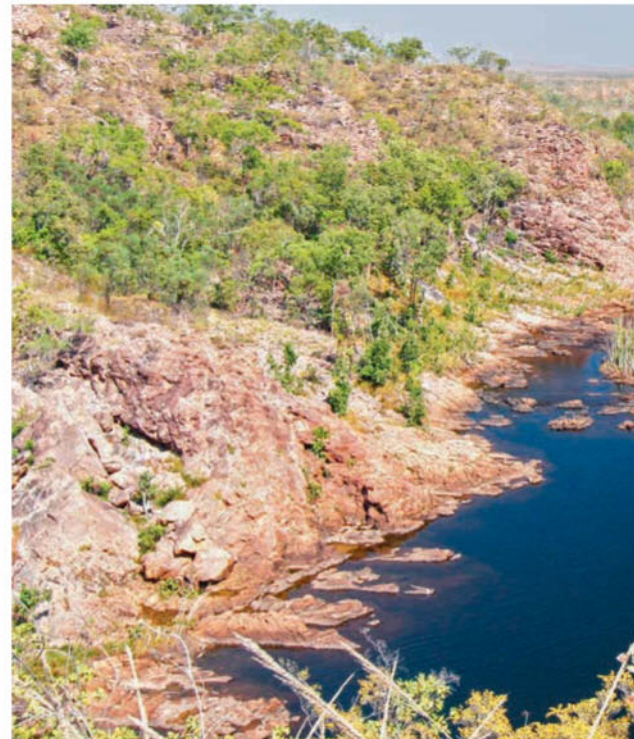
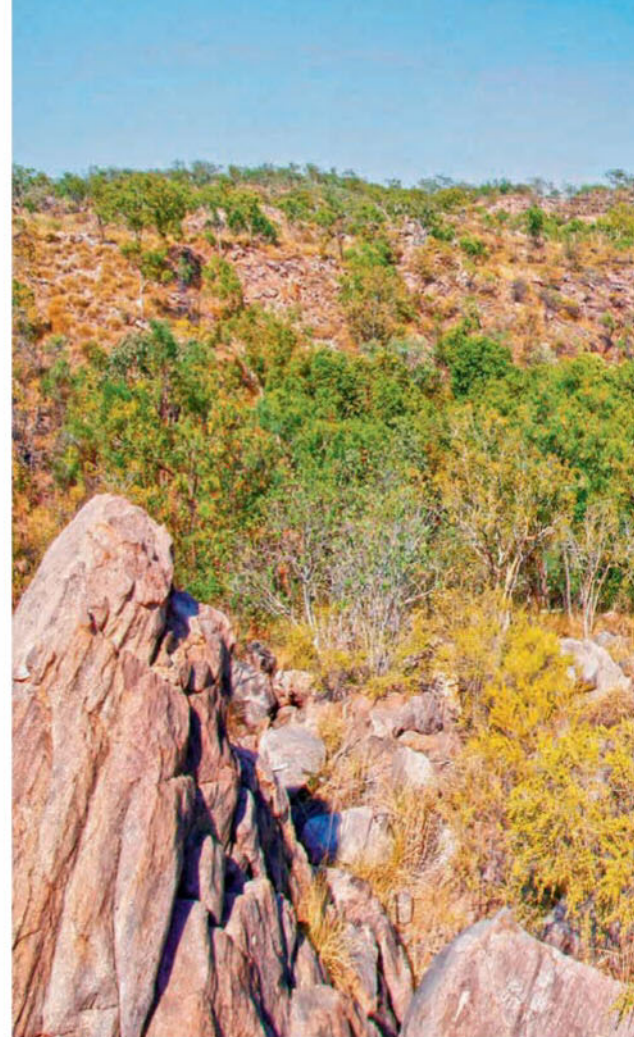
Located 42km north of Katherine, NT, and 20km off the Stuart Highway, Edith Falls is a small and deceptively remote pocket on the western boundary of the Nitmiluk National Park (NP). We had stayed at the park's main attraction Katherine Gorge some weeks earlier and passed by this lesser-known enclave on our Top End trek north to Litchfield. Now we were on our way back south and decided to make camp here for a few days to see how it compared. All roads out of the Top End pass through Katherine, unless one has a permit, and the stamina, to exit through East Arnhem Land.

This section of the park is focused on a series of picturesque waterfalls and large pools created by the Edith River as it cascades off an ancient sandstone escarpment, falling about 175m along its 69km course before merging with the Ferguson River north-west of Katherine. Edith Falls is the last and most impressive in the chain, plunging about 12m into a huge, mirror-smooth pool (more like a small lake) that acts like a reservoir of crystal clear water before the river drains out its western end through a channel lined with pandanus and paperbarks. It is an idyllic place for swimming in the middle of an otherwise parched and rocky plain.

DO NOT DISTURB

It is also a culturally significant place for the local Jawoyn people, who call it 'Leliyn'. In their law, many mythical creation beings are associated with the site, including Bolung, the Rainbow Serpent, who is said to inhabit deep waterholes in the area, including the plunge pool at the base of the falls. She is a powerful figure and is not to be disturbed or disrespected.

Within a short walk from the lake's stony shore lies the shady, park-like picnic area



and campground, well-appointed with gas barbecues, tables and an ablution block with a laundry, toilets and showers. There is also a kiosk that sells food and drinks and this is where we headed on arrival to pay our camping fees for an unpowered site (there are no powered sites here). Although it doesn't enjoy quite the same notoriety as Katherine Gorge, Edith



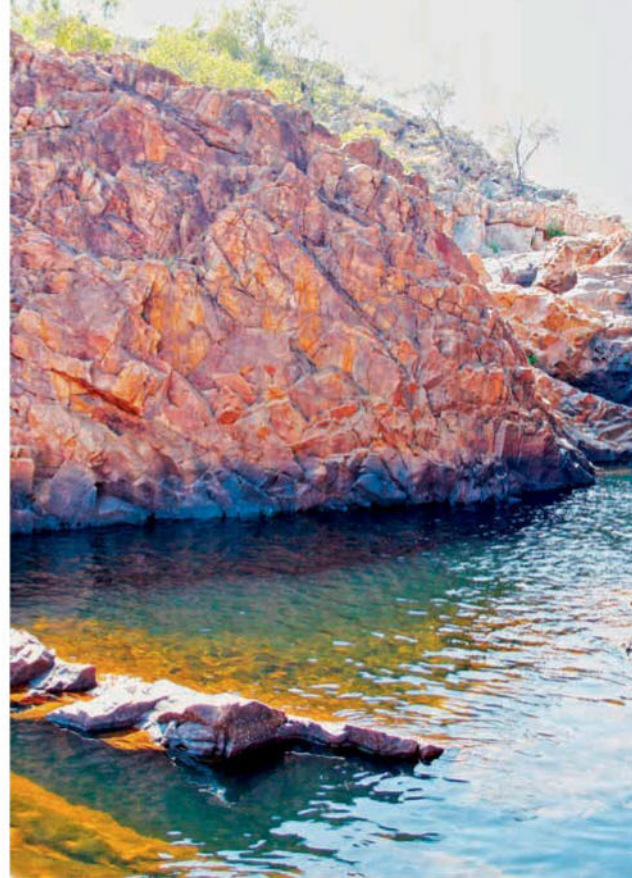
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Rocky savannah typical of the region; Although it was busy, we still managed to find a delightful unpowered site at the campground near Edith Falls; The Middle Pool.



Falls is still a popular destination in the Top End, especially during the peak tourist season between June and September. We were not surprised, therefore, when we rolled up at the end of August to find the camp nearly full to capacity.

Still, we managed to score a pleasant drive-through site on which to set up the

Kimberley Karavan, near some leafy salmon gums that proved popular with vivid red-winged parrots that came each day to feast upon the gum nuts. In fact, the park is a vital habitat for several species of rare and endangered birds, like the Gouldian finch and the hooded parrot, and some ubiquitous ones such as thieving crows, which pinched the spicy buffalo



sausages we had left out to defrost for dinner that night, and curlews that woke us in the night with their cry-baby calls.

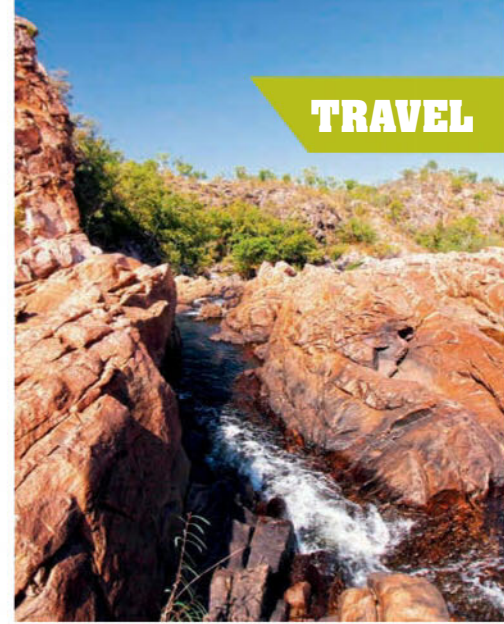
We had arrived at the camp around midday, under a cloudless sky burnished pale copper by the smoke haze from nearby late-season fires. It was devilishly hot and, as soon as we had set up and had lunch, we headed to the lake beneath the falls for a dip to escape the baking heat. We found the pool wide and deep, with water cascading in sufficient volume over the falls to create a decent spectacle for a Top End landscape in the grip of the dry season. And there was enough breeze to add a chilly edge to the already fresh water in the lagoon.

Next morning, hoping to beat the worst of the day's heat, we set out early for some bushwalking, the other activity that is very popular in this section of the park. There are two walking trails at Leliyn. The longer of the two is the 9km (return) track to Sweetwater Pool, a permanent waterhole and fantastic swimming spot, with a small campsite (and toilet) for overnight hikers. It is one of the waypoints on the 66km Jatbula Trail that connects Leliyn with Katherine Gorge.

CHAIN OF POOLS

Given the oven-like conditions prevailing that early in the day, we opted for the shorter Leliyn Trail, a 2.6km loop of moderate difficulty via the Upper Pool. From its start near the picnic area carpark, the trail climbed steeply for about 500m to the top of the escarpment, then traversed a landscape of grevilleas and spinifex to a stony ridge overlooking the Edith River. As we stood at the lookout admiring the





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Some of the rugged country surrounding the Upper Falls; The Upper Pool; Edith River has carved its way through the gorge over millennia of wet seasons; The plunge pool at Edith Falls.



view through woolybutts and salmon gums, we were joined by a group of hikers who were just completing six gruelling days on the Jatbula Trail and heading for a well-earned dip at the waterhole below us. With that one thought in mind, we all descended the track into the gorge embracing the Upper Pool.

Here, the orange sandstone terraces had been worn smooth and shiny by countless wet season torrents that have coursed through the valley over millennia. The pool was emerald-deep and refreshingly cool after our short, but sweaty, walk from the camp, and we lay around like lizards basking at the river's

edge as it drifted placidly by on the way to the next cascade into the Middle Pool. After this most agreeable aquatic interlude, we pulled our walking gear on over still soggy togs and scrambled up the steep, rocky slope from the gorge to Bemang Lookout.

This vantage point bears the Jawoyn name for frilled-neck lizard, which are said to have travelled through the country and created the pools here. We took a moment to regain our breath and enjoy the panoramic view of the waterfall into Middle Pool and along the gorge to the narrow defile behind Edith Falls. The track continued along an exposed ridge that looked

FAST FACTS

- > The turn-off to the Leliyn (Edith Falls) section of the Nitmiluk National Park is 42km north-west of Katherine and 49km south-east of Pine Creek along the Stuart Highway. The camping area and day use area at Leliyn is at the end of a sealed road 20km from the highway junction.
- > The most comfortable months to visit are from May to September. Wet season flooding between December and April may restrict the range of activities available and prevent access to the park.
- > Phone the NT Parks & Wildlife Commission on (08) 8973 8888 or (08) 8975 4852 (Edith Falls), or visit www.nt.gov.au/nretas/parks for more information.
- > Contact the Nitmiluk Visitor's Centre (Nitmiluk Tours) Nitmiluk NP on (08) 8971 0877 to book a tour or visit www.nitmiluktours.com.au for more information.
- > Katherine Visitor Centre is located located at Stuart Hwy, Katherine NT. Phone (08) 8972 2650 or visit www.visitkatherine.com.au for more information.
- > To contact the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, phone (08) 8972 5400 or visit www.jawoyn.org for more information.



ABOVE: Edith Falls flows even in the dry season.

out across a landscape of jumbled sandstone outcrops interspersed with straw-coloured spinifex that sloped down to gullies where meagre stands of gum trees clung to life along invisible streams that fed the river.

Despite its stark hostility, this rugged terrain above the falls supports an amazing diversity of

life. Plants in this environment are adapted to the dry and sandy conditions and, amazingly, are more closely related to the flora of south-western Australia than the plants found in the lowlands only a few hundred metres away. After a kilometre or so, the track emerged once more at the lip of the escarpment to reveal a sweeping view over a sparsely wooded, tinder-brown plain, where the river marked its course with a long green corridor of paperbarks and pandanus as it snaked its way into the distant haze. And we were reminded once again that, even in the most terrible dry, there is always water flowing in the Edith River to feed the falls and pools.

At the river, the trail morphed to stepping-stones that carried us to the other bank. We paused mid-stream to gaze in wonder at the unbelievably clear water and the avenue of verdant vegetation that beckoned us towards the Lower Pool beneath the falls, and yet another relieving swim. It was wonderful to be able to enjoy these watery excursions without having to worry about whether we would become a meal for some reptile lurking unseen beneath the waters. Having said that, I almost stepped on a snake while crossing the open lawn of the campground back to Tikay – a reminder, I suppose, of just how Edenic this paradise the Jawoyn call Leliyn really was. **CTA**



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The peaceful campground at Wreck Rock.



A silver Toyota Land Cruiser is parked on a dirt path in a dense, lush forest. A person is sitting in a camp chair to the left of the vehicle. The scene is surrounded by tall trees and dense foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. A white outline of the state of Queensland is visible on the right side of the image.

DEEPWATER DREAMING

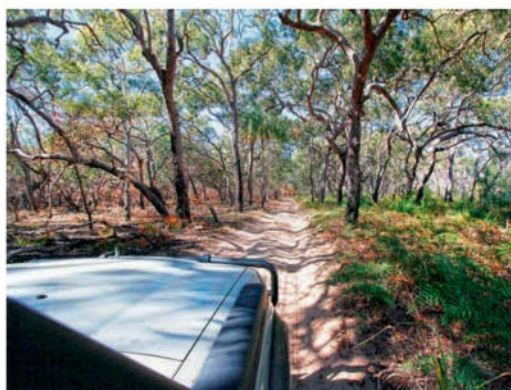
EXPERIENCE THE PLEASURE OF DEEPWATER NP, WHERE THE ONLY FOOTPRINTS YOU'RE LIKELY TO SEE ON THE BEACH WILL BE YOUR OWN.

WORDS AND PICS CHRIS WHITELAW



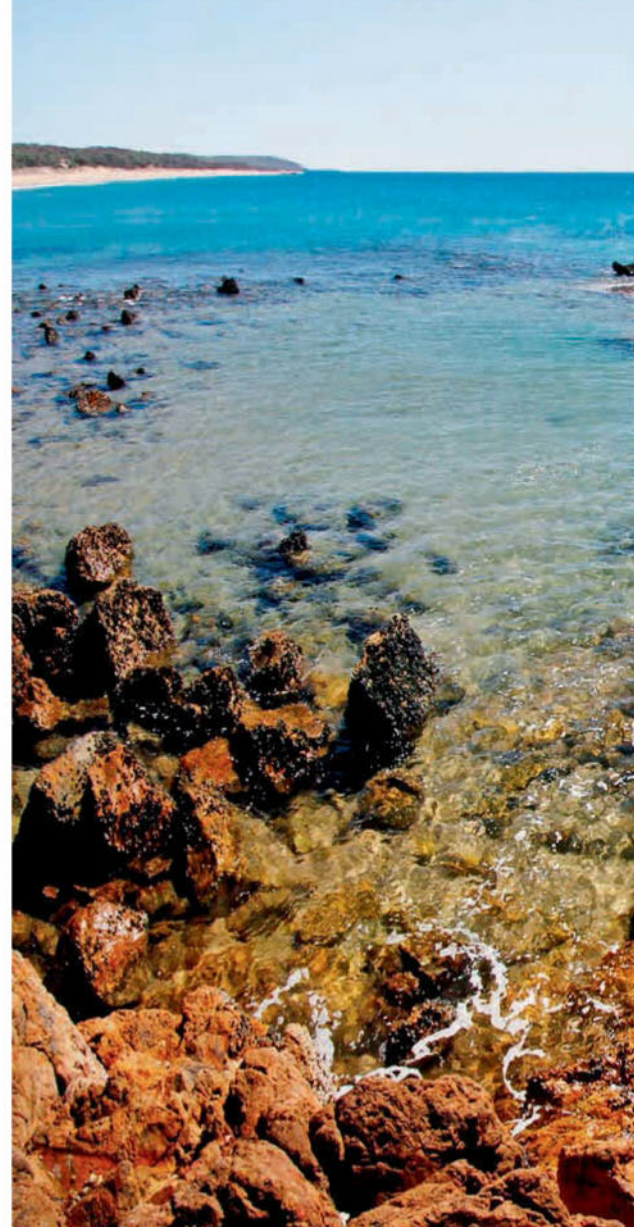
FAST FACTS

- > The Deepwater National Park is 112km or about 1½ hours' drive from Bundaberg on Queensland's Central Coast. From the Bruce Highway at Miriam Vale, take the Fingerboard Road and Round Hill Road to Agnes Water, then Springs Road south for 4km to the park's northern boundary.
- > The Wreck Rock campground is 8km along the 4WD-only track from the entrance to the park. For campsite bookings phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68) or visit www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/deepwater/ for information on Deep Water National Park.
- > The Bundaberg Visitor Information Centre is at 271 Bourbong Street, Bundaberg. Phone (07) 4153 8888 or visit www.bundabergregion.org for more information.
- > The Agnes Water Visitor Information Centre is at 71 Springs Road, Agnes Water. Phone (07) 4902 1533 for more information.
- > The Gladstone Visitor Information Centre is at Marina Ferry Terminal, 72 Bryan Jordan Drive, Gladstone. Visit www.gladstoneregion.info or phone (07) 4972 9000 for more information.



The twin towns of Seventeen Seventy and Agnes Water on Queensland's central coast offer eco-tourists a broad range of experiences. As well as being the state's 'birthplace' – the site of Captain Cook's second landing on mainland Australia on May 24, 1770 – they are also the gateway for discovering the region's many natural attractions. One of the most beautiful of these is Deepwater National Park (NP), 4730ha of sandy beaches and sub-tropical lowland forest protecting a unique coastal freshwater ecosystem centred on Deepwater Creek. On a recent 'winter getaway' with our offroad Kimberley Karavan, *Tikay*, we spent a couple of days finding out why this park is such a popular camping destination.

There are two camping areas within the park, one at Middle Rock and the other at Wreck Rock, which was our destination further south. It is possible to access Wreck Rock from the south by conventional vehicle but, coming from the north as we were, the track conditions demand a high-clearance 4WD and, if towing, an offroad capable camper trailer. Caravans are not suitable for either route.



“Occasionally we glimpsed a distant beachcomber or a lone fisherman casting a line from the rocks”

ADVENTURE LAND

The weather gods were smiling as we set out from Agnes Water early one August morning and followed the sealed Springs Road for about 4km to the park's northern boundary. At this point the bitumen ends abruptly and the adventure begins as you plunge into a track of deep, soft sand as it ascends terrain dominated by a vegetated, 70m-high dune system. Signs warn of the approaching hazard and we took the time to lower tyre pressures and engage low range before entering this beguiling coastal woodland. Our plan to get an early start in order to avoid other traffic on this difficult track paid off – we didn't



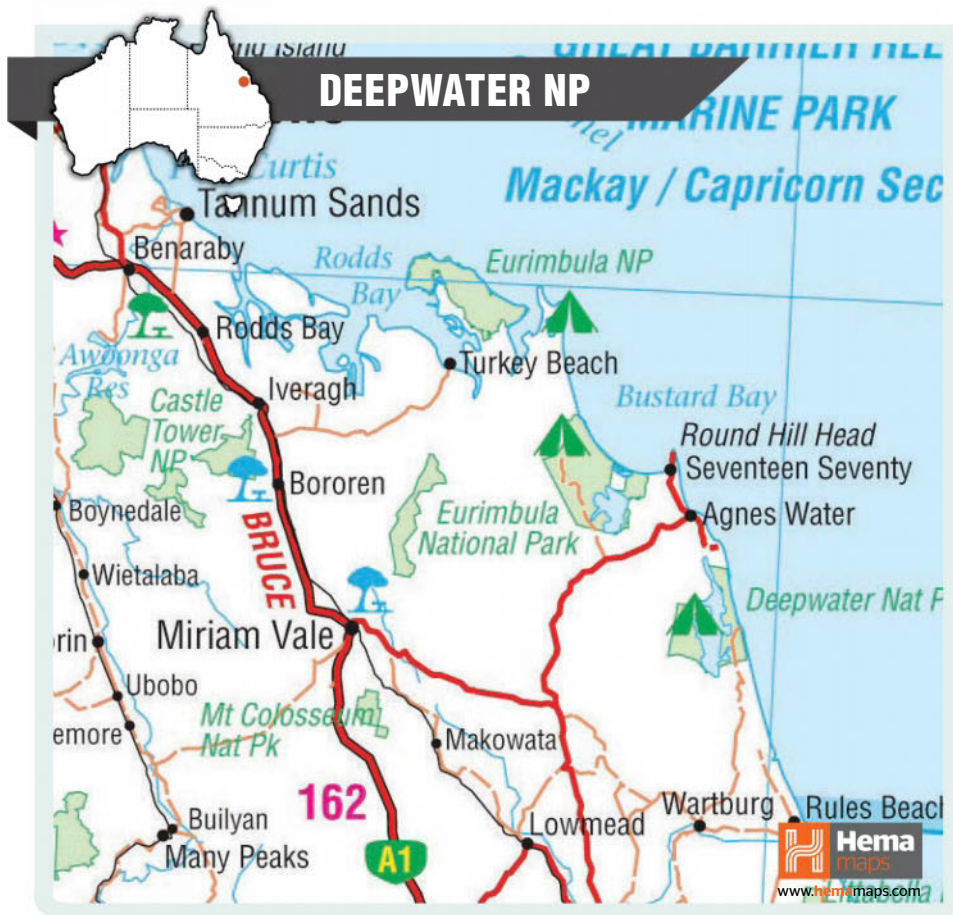
encounter any other vehicles travelling in either direction, which was just as well because the few pull-outs provided as passing points were berms up to half-a-metre high of even deeper, softer sand.

For the most part, the track was fairly straight, which enabled us to enjoy the passing scenery – an open forest of pink bloodwoods liberally interspersed with weeping cabbage palms, grass trees and wallum banksias festooned with creamy-yellow



cones. About 4km into this heavenly landscape, a side-track diverts to the east and connects with the Flat Rock Day Use Area. This location takes its name from a rock platform just offshore that encloses a natural

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: On the tracks with *Tikay* in tow; Crystal clear waters; Enjoying a lazy stroll to the beach at Wreck Rock; Cast a line from the shore; The track passed through a forest of pink bloodwoods.



pool at low tide and affords some protection from the strong currents that sweep the exposed beaches of the Discovery Coast.

BACK TO NATURE

Two kilometres further on another track branches off to Middle Rock. This shady camp in the forest behind the dunes is just a short walk from the beach and, with no facilities, offers a real 'back to nature experience' in peaceful seclusion. We saw only two groups relaxing in their bivouacs as we followed the track through the vine thickets to a long



deserted beach punctuated at the southern end by a loose jumble of basalt boulders that are collectively Middle Rock.

After another 2km we came at last to the junction for Wreck Rock camping area, where 14 sites are conveniently laid out in a circuit through the forest, all handy to the facilities – toilets, a cold outdoor shower (that was character building) and taps that supplied non-potable water – not flash but sufficient for a comfortable stay in a beautiful bushland setting. Many of the sites were large enough to set up a camper trailer with annexe and



still have room to park the car. Only a few of these were occupied and we set up *Tikay* in a secluded glade of weeping cabbage palms well away from the others. During our several days here we heard nothing of our neighbours above the birdsong and sea breeze in the palms.

Each day we walked to the beach, five

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: An ebbing tide drains Wreck Rock; Entering Wreck Rock campground from the north requires a 4WD and high clearance offroad camper; Plenty of shade at camp; Just one set of footprints on the sand; The camping area lies behind the dunes.



ABOVE: A gentle surf lapped the shore at Middle Rock.

minutes away, where gentle surf lapped around a rocky outcrop that separated two long beaches stretching away to the north and south as far as the eye could see. Occasionally we glimpsed a distant beachcomber or a lone fisherman casting a line from the rocks, but otherwise we had the entire pristine shoreline to ourselves – affirming

the claim in the local tourist brochure that the only footprints you're likely to see on the beach will be your own. There wasn't much to do except walk or swim or sit on the dune or in our camp chairs in the dappled shade, feeling the tranquillity of the place wash over us, thinking all the while: it doesn't get much better than this! **CTA**

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Murray-Sunset National Park is Victoria's own slice of the outback.



Under THE MALLEE

RED DIRT ADVENTURES AWAIT IN VICTORIA'S OWN SLICE OF OUTBACK.

WORDS AND PICS GREG CARTAN



FROM TOP: Lake Hardy in the Pink Lakes district; A challenge beckons; The park's facilities are excellent.

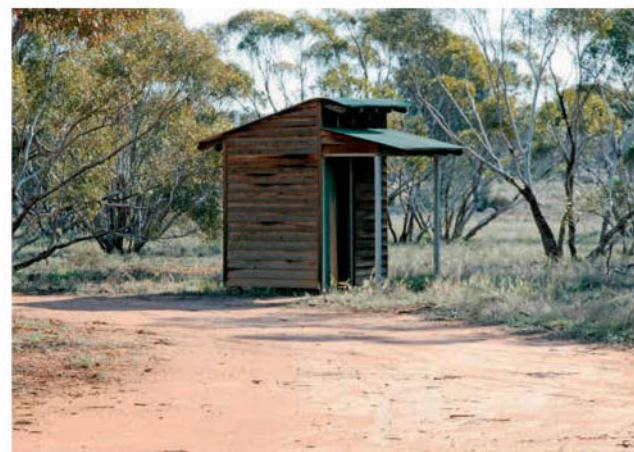
FAST FACTS

- > Murray-Sunset National Park is in the north-west corner of Victoria, about 80km south of Mildura. There are entry points on all sides of the park but the most commonly used by towing a camper trailer or caravan is off the Mallee Highway, west of Ouyen. You can also enter off the Calder Highway or east of Loxton through Taplin Gate.
- > This is a do-it-yourself experience, so you'll need to make your own fun – enjoy the rich mallee scrub, go bushwalking, do some birdwatching, and check out some of the pastoral relics.
- > You'll need the national parks map and brochure. Phone Parks Victoria on 13 19 63 or visit www.parkweb.vic.gov.au for more.
- > Mildura Visitor Information Centre is at 180 Deakin Ave, Mildura. Phone 1800 039 043 for more.

For those living in the south-east of this great country, and particularly for people who live in Victoria, the outback can seem like a distant dream, a long way off in the centre of the continent. But, it turns out, you don't need to travel for days to get that feeling of isolation or to see endless stretches of red dirt and mallee scrub; you can find all this, and more, tucked away in the far north-west corner of Victoria in the Murray-Sunset National Park (NP).

Murray-Sunset NP comprises 677,000ha of mallee bushland, and can be seen as encompassing three different sections. The far north-west section takes in Lindsay Island, right on the Murray River. The southern section is around the Pink Lakes area, which is suitable for most caravans, campers and some 2WD vehicles. The roads in this area are unsealed but maintained, and there are basic facilities.

In the centre and north (the bulk of the park), are bush campsites, unsealed roads (varying from good condition to pretty average tracks) and plenty of isolation. This part of the park has some challenging sections of track – there are some soft, sandy strips, quite a few corrugations and, in the low-lying areas, it can get boggy in the wet. For this central section, you'll want an offroad camper or, alternatively, leave it at the





Pink Lakes and head off solo in the 4WD.

The distances are not daunting but travel can be slow – a rough guide is about 100km from east to west and also from north to south – and the majority of places to see are in the eastern quarter. Get your hands on a decent map before you go and you should get around without too much difficulty.

While overall the driving challenges are not too intimidating, if the weather gets ugly I'd head for the tar, or the relative comfort of the Pink Lakes. Remember that the park is quite isolated so make sure you're well-stocked, particularly with water, and have some recovery gear and the appropriate communication equipment. Before you hit the park, you can stock up at one of the nearby towns, such as Mildura, Ouyen or Loxton. Of course, a puncture repair kit should be considered essential as small pieces of debris (such as mallee roots) adorn the tracks and can be lethal for tyres.

All camping must be in designated areas. And how good is this? No permits, bookings or fees, and campfires are permitted in the fire pits provided. There are a few camping areas throughout the park and they offer basic facilities including toilets, fireplaces, picnic tables, and some limited water. They are usually shady, flat and suitable for campers. There is also



“Not a soul in sight, warm, no wind, early moon, and a steak on the hotplate. Nope, it doesn't get any better than that”

some bunkhouse-style accommodation in the Shearers' Quarters in the north-west of the park.

Coming from Adelaide, the Shearers' Quarters is ideal and we camped there on the first night. It's a top spot, with high, shady trees and flat, open, RV-friendly spaces, firepits and a (pretty

TOP: Fun and games on the Pheeneys Track en-route to the Cattle Yards. **ABOVE:** Quiet contemplation at the deserted campsite near Mopoke Hut.



ABOVE: Salt-resistant algae give colour to the Pink Lakes.

basic) long-drop. The Shearers' Quarters themselves are worth a visit – grazing began here in the mid-1800s and the pastoral heritage is a feature of the park.

PASTORALIST'S PAST

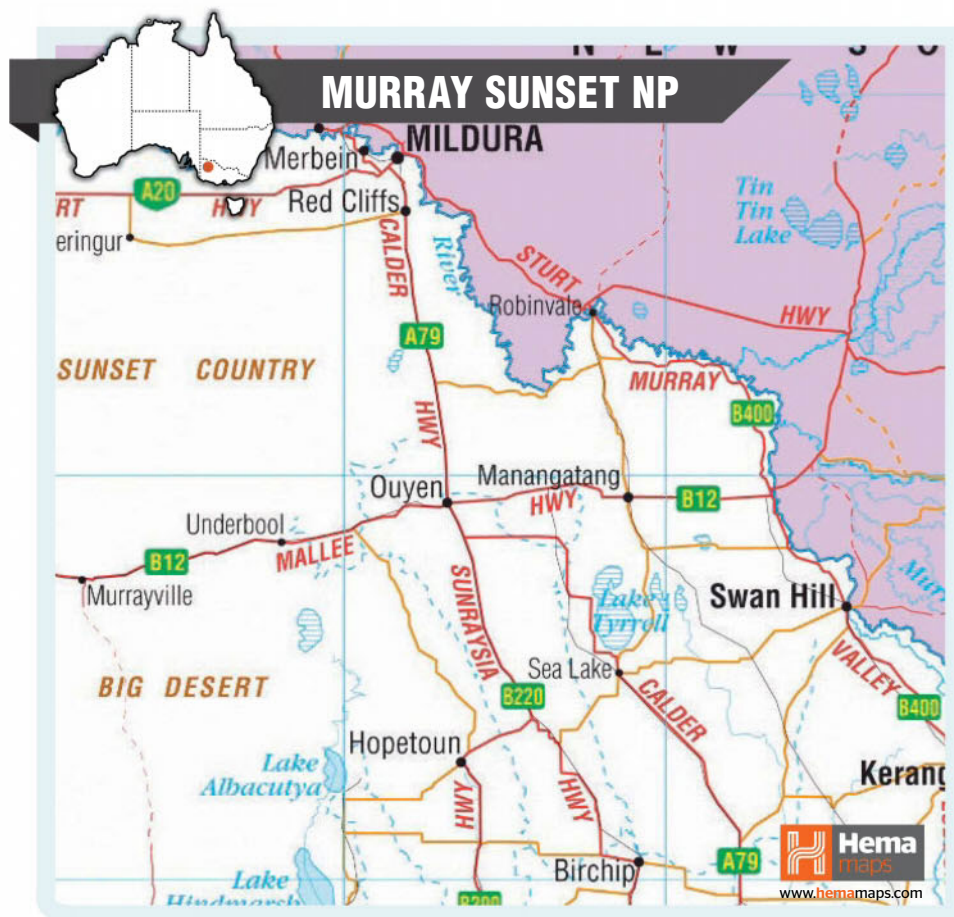
There are two main west-east tracks – Pheeney's and the Sunset Track. We took Pheeney's this time. A rain front had passed through about a week earlier, so a few interesting boggy patches were added to the usual stretches of good, flat track, interspersed with some corrugations and rocky sections. No soft sand through here, though.

After 125km of dawdling along we stopped for lunch at the Cattle Yards on the Grub Track. These are a classic post and rail structure, now totally dilapidated. But I love these little bits of nostalgia and this one confirms the ingenuity and seriously hard toil the pastoralists injected into the country.

We continued east to the relative civilisation of the Pink Lakes. The Pioneer Drive is billiard-table-flat and the main campground at Lake Crosby is neatly set out in defined sites, well-separated so neighbours are kept at a comfortable distance. This was deemed a good spot for our second camp.

The red algae in the lakes create a beautiful pink tinge and makes for some great photo opportunities. There are a few short walking trails and Pioneer Drive is okay for cycling if you have bikes on hand. If you're not feeling energetic, then a cold drink overlooking the lake on a warm day might be ample exercise – it was for us.

Our next day was spent roaming the tracks in the eastern quarter. Most are comfortable driving but the Mount Crozier Track up to Mopoke





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mining relics near Mopoke Hut; Tracks of varying terrain interspersed with interesting sites make the Murray-Sunset NP a fun 4WDing destination; The Shearers' Quarters are in the park's north-west.

Hut has some seriously soft sand sections which, even with tyre pressures lowered, was a grind. But there's plenty to see. The region was extensively mined for gypsum over the years and there's some old machinery and equipment around the two tracks running in from the east: the Nowingi Line and the track out from Hatta. The plan was to open up the area with a rail line between Nowingi and the South Australian border in the late 1920s, but it was abandoned after only

24 miles of track was laid.

There are two comfortable campsites in this part of the park. Rocket Lake has shade, spacious sites, and toilet facilities. Brian Sheedy, who wrote a book entitled *Discovering Mallee Country*, reckons the lake got its name from the practice of setting off a flare from the camp to advise the railway workers that it was time for a smoko! Sounds reasonable, I guess. The campground at Mopoke Hut is bigger, with very usable space for a dozen RVs. The hut itself is another remainder from the pastoral activities. We set up camp for the night – not a soul in sight, warm, no wind, early moon, and a steak on the hotplate. Nope, it doesn't get any better than that.

ON TRACK

On our third day, we headed south-west over the Nowingi Line and Underbool tracks to pick up the eastern end of the Sunset Track. We only

TRAVEL



ABOVE: The 'Cattle Yards' relics are found on the Grub Track.


had a few days for this trip, so we needed to start edging back westward. Most of the 45km on Sunset was very comfortable driving – with the motor just ticking over at about 40-50km/h, windows down, sun beaming in and keeping us warm, kangaroos scattering and birds playing.

There's a variety of bird species in the park and while we were there, we bumped into a couple of nice researchers from La Trobe University, conducting bird research. There is a longitudinal study counting various species by sector. They come out a few times each year for

a week at a time and camp out. Good work, if you can get it!

The eastern portion of the Sunset Track has a few longer dunes and the sand can be a little soft. You'll need to keep the revs up and maybe lower your tyres a little more. But, overall, it's a good run. The road exits the park briefly and you follow the formed roads north and then back into the park where you can stop to check out the Rock Holes. Given the rich Indigenous history of the area, I imagine this source of water was an integral part of their semi-nomadic lifestyle.

The South Bore Track tackles a few firm sand dunes, rocks and mud holes, taking us back to the Shearers' Quarters. This was our last night out, and we'd come full circle. The weather behaved and the campfire chat turned to our next trip...

Overall, the Murray-Sunset National Park is a real gem. We did about 450km over a variety of tracks, experienced a range of vegetation and got a glimpse into our past. The tracks are well-signed, there's good interpretative signage, and the facilities are adequate. While there are towns nearby, the body of the park is still quite remote so good preparation is essential. If towing your camper in these conditions doesn't sound like a good option, set yourself up at the Pink Lakes or the Shearers' Quarters and take some day trips. It's a great experience 



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Nigel Welsh from Hornsby, NSW, fitted a hot water service at the site of an unused jerry can holder. He replaced the holder with a galvanised sheet container, folded to fit a gas-fired instant Smarttek 6 system.

The electric starter is wired to the camper's battery and the gas is hard plumbed. A retrofitted auxiliary pump protects the main one when extracting shower water from a creek, while a



valve allows the service to also draw from the camper's internal reserves.

Nigel stores shower accoutrements in the

100mm PVC tube and uses a removeable canvas cover padded with dense rubber to protect the hot water service in transit.

EXTRA BENCH

Ray Pridham of Richmond, NSW, made an alloy bench extension. Cut and folded professionally around the sides, it clips to the mudguard with two cut-down adjustable tent poles as support.



PORTABLE POCKET

Sallie McGaw made a bedside storage pocket for her husband, who kept asking for stuff from the two inbuilt pockets near her side of the bed just as she was falling asleep.

To create the tabbed pocket, she pulled out her trusty sewing machine and stitched together an old work shirt, heavy plastic from doona packaging and Velcro for the tabs to attach it to a bar by her husband's side of the bed.

"Voila! All his nighttime necessities are close to hand, able to be seen, and I'm redundant! Perfect," Sallie said.

When it comes to coffee, we don't believe in roughing it.





INSTA-ROBE

Steve and Anne Budden from Pitt Town, NSW, keep their daily camping garb in order and close at hand with a simple coat hanger bar that clips onto two pop-up roof handles above

the foot of the bed.

The clothes air out of the way, overnight. The two-piece bar sits under the mattress during travel.

JOCKEY WHEEL CHOCK

Peter Sluyter from Brisbane keeps his camper and jockey wheel in place with a double-sided chock made from plywood scrap.

Two triangle pieces cut to the profile of the jockey wheel rest upon a horizontal beam. To use, Peter simply pushes it in place.



STORAGE TIDY

Doug and Jenny Peisley from Dubbo, NSW, fitted two sets of storage baskets on slides to the inside of their camper trailer's pantry to

help keep their kitchen organised.

The couple found the drawers online for \$56. 

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A pastry retreat

COOKIE STEPS OUT OF THE KITCHEN AND INTO THE FIRE ONCE AGAIN.

The life of a magazine journalist can be hectic. Many readers believe we in the media spend our days immersed in sumptuous opulence fettered by camper manufacturers and jetsetting from resort to resort. But the hard truth is that while this may apply to our editors, we at the coal face endure a life of grindingly long hours, little sleep and a poor diet.

Not that I am complaining. The vital task of keeping the camper trailer world on its ever upward trajectory needs to be done.

Of course, we get to try out new campers, our trips are tax deductible and our opinions are highly sought, though the autograph hand suffers cramps.

Last night, I was reminded of another travellers' peril while reading Scott Heiman's take on the Aussie meat pie, published in issue 95 of *Camper Trailer Australia*. As a camper who prefers to tour, the pie is a familiar denizen of my life.

Cardboard pastries Tig-welded over brown lumpy liquid give way to succulent gravy, real chunks of tender meat cooked in crisp flaky pastry once you're out on the road. Small town bakeries sure do have a knack with pies.

But what I do lament is the lack of temperature control.

You know what it's like. You've been on the road for four hours trying to get 600, 700, maybe even 800km under the tyres before sunset, with ambitions of waking up to red soil and salt bush. Breakfast was well in the past and your partner's ministrations of chips, snakes and, if they have your health at heart, the odd piece of fruit fails to satisfy your yearning for something more substantial.

You ease off the throttle, roll into a small town, and there, on a corner is a shop front plastered with 'Bakery' across the glass. Automatically, your right foot swings on to the brake and as you ease to the side of the road, you blurt, "I need a break and a pie."

You stiffly putter across the road into the cavern of wonders. The smell hits you first and then you spot trays of golden brown discs behind sloping glass, with enticing labels like chicken; avocado and beef; or classics like brisket, red wine and mushroom; and beef bourguignon. Not to mention the sausage rolls! Oh, be still my racing heart.

This place is an Aladdin's cave. The mind races, the heart thumps, saliva oozes from the



WORDS AND PICS
DAVID COOK

corners of your mouth and begins to drip on to your shirt. What to pick? What to choose? You're stumped for a while, then you point towards the juicy brown steak and kidney offering, spittle flying wildly as you anticipate the moment supreme. You order a garnish of the rich red tangy tomato sauce, a sausage rolls for good measure, along with a creamy caramel malted milkshake to wash it all down.

How much more Aussie could this get?

The assistant shovels your choices into white paper bags then turns to the delights of the sugary flavourings along the bench behind, ladling in a large dipper full of milk with a generous scoop of ice cream, topped by two big squirts of caramel. The mixer seems to take forever to froth the milk into a foam before you willingly hand over your cash and turn to your patient partner (who foolishly invested in a salad sandwich) at the coloured plastic strips that define the doorway and fend off the flies.

SUCH SWEET SORROWS

You have a long way to go – that B-double through the spur left you running behind – so you opt to eat on the move.

Back into the 4WD you climb, snap on the belt, starting the engine as you rest your two paper bags on the front seat console and insert the shake into the drink holder.

A quick glance in the mirror, blinkers on, and out on to the highway you pull. As the diesel pulls you back up to the 60km/h speed limit, you reach over and drop the bigger of your bags into your lap. The warmth instantly permeates your clothes and already you know this relationship with this pie is going to be all you'd dreamed it might be.

You barely have the plastic capsule of sauce hovering over the crust of the pie and you're back into 100km/h country again. Glancing down you carefully aim the red sauce, smearing it across the gold like a jewel in a pharaoh's crown. Checking the speedo, you turn on and set your cruise control. The road is clear, the cool spring sunshine is beaming down, here we go. You lift the parcel of meaty treasure to your mouth and bite in.

Instantly you recognise that the warm outer crust belies the furnace beneath. Your mouth is immediately filled with molten magma. It squirts

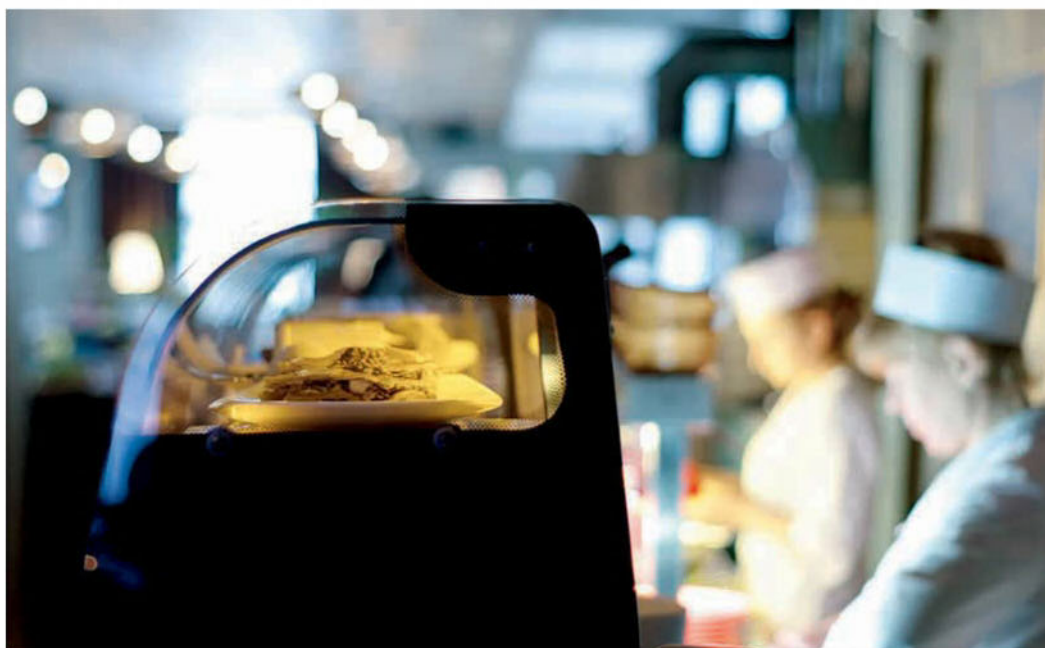
“Glancing down you carefully aim the red sauce, smearing it across the gold like a jewel in a pharaoh's crown”

out sideways across both cheeks. The tip of your tongue turns to a black, curled, charred remnant in less time than you can respond. A huge blister forming behind your front teeth instantly bursts.

You hunch over, like you've been punched in the gut. Your eyes slam shut, but you force them open and now they're each the size of a high intensity floodlight. You gasp, scream a guttural noise. Like a reflex action, your left arm jerks the lava-filled bomb away from your face, spattering its dark brown molten across the dash, where the plastic faux leather begins to blister and bubble. So rapid is your arm's response that your teeth are still locked together, and it rips a gaping hole across the top of the pie.

The lava bomb in your mouth has now begun to crack the enamel on your teeth, so you jerk your mouth open and the flaming magma spills down your shirt front. You try to put down the traitorous crusty hand grenade but you miss the bag in your haste and it lands, broken edge down, on the top of the gear-shift and within seconds it's dripping down on to the base and oozing into the transmission tunnel.

You grab for the milkshake to ease the third-degree burns in and around your mouth but in your haste you squeeze the cardboard cup so tight the lid pops off. What should have been a nicely curved edge reaching your lips has devolved into a jagged fissure and the straw pokes you in the eye, stopping the whole container a centimetre



short of your mouth causing half the contents to spill down your front.

You pull to the side of the road, open the door and tumble awkwardly out onto the asphalt. You stand a burned, bedraggled and blistered bundle, burdened by betrayal.

You reach in and grab the remains of the traitorous pie from the gear-shift and hurl it with all your remaining strength along the highway, where it instantly begins to soften the asphalt. A gluttonous crow swoops from a nearby tree and eyes this strange lump, takes one peck at it and drops dead.

You swear you'll never eat a pie again, again. **ETA**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Porkie pies lie ready to eat, straight from the oven; The pastry was invented to protect your hands; At the ready behind the counter.



Sweet Peak

RON TAKES A MOMENT TO MARVEL AT THE SOMETIMES SHIFTING SANDS THAT REACH MOUNTAIN HIGH.

This time 12 months ago, *4x4 Australia* magazine, in conjunction with CTA, ran a trip across the Great Australian Bight. It's a fabulous journey and I hope some of you have now done the same trip, or part of it, or are planning to do so.

That trip takes you past some of the most impressive dunes in Australia. The Bilbunya Dunes, about 80km north of Israelite Bay, WA, lie just back from the long sweep of beach and crowd up to the edge of the Wylie Scarp. At about 120m in height, they are impressive white mountains of sand and offer a great camping experience and a fabulous vista. But they are nowhere near the highest in Australia!

Mount Tempest on Moreton Island, Qld, cracks 280m and is the tallest dune in Australia. From there, it's a big drop to



the Bilbunya Dunes and another slide to the 100m Thurra Sand Dunes in Croajingolong NP in Victoria. Fourth on the list that I could discover are the 70m tall dunes of the 'Little Sahara' on Kangaroo Island in South Australia.

Then there is, of course, the Nappanerica Dune in the eastern Simpson, more famously named 'Big Red' by desert traveller Dennis Bartell, back when he was blazing trails across the Simpson Desert, way before anyone else. Big Red, though, only climbs to just 42m above the pans that line both sides of it, although I'm sure many people who have tried to climb it in their 4WD would swear that it was taller. It remains one of the great challenges of crossing the Simpson.

Still, these mountains of Aussie sand are mere tiddlers when it comes to the biggest dunes around the world.

A couple of years back, when we were driving through South America, we had wound our way down from the enormous mountain range of the Andes to the great desert that stretches along much of the west coast. The Atacama Desert here merges, almost imperceptibly, with the much lesser known Sechura Desert, but this desert does have one big claim to fame – it is home to reputedly the tallest sand dune in the world.

'Cerro Blanco' is visible from the main highway as the road switchbacks down the



ABOVE: The Bilbunya Dunes north of Israelite Bay. **BOTTOM:** Cerro Blanco in Chile is visible from the highway.


flank of the Andes and, even if you know nothing about sand dunes, this mighty mound of sand stands out from the crowd of

hills and peaks around it. At 1176m from its base to wind-blown crest (or 3860ft in the old money), this pile of drifting sand gives some of our more well-known Australian mountains a good run for their money.

After this monster, the next biggest dunes in the world are the Badain Jaran Dunes in the Gobi Desert of China tipping the scale at 500m from base to crest. These dunes are reputedly the tallest stationary dunes in the world.

Over the last decade or so we've been lucky enough to travel to Sossusvlei in the Namib Desert of Namibia a couple of times and, here, a number of big dunes can be found. It's a great drive and Dune 7, or 'Big Daddy' as it is known, tops the scales at around 380m, which puts it on par with many of the big dunes in the vast sand seas of Arabia.

There's a few more big dunes in Algeria and Iran which top 465m from base to crest, while the tallest sand dune in the USA is found in the Great Sand Dune National Park & Preserve in Colorado where the 'Star Dune' measure 230m from base to crest. One thing the Star Dune excels at though, is the number of visitors that climb its flank – it is no doubt, the most visited big dune in the world!

Now, take a drive with the camper in tow and enjoy some of our great sand dunes! 

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Towering hazards

WE ALL KNOW EUCALYPTS DROP THEIR LIMBS, SO WHO'S RESPONSIBLE WHEN THEY FALL AT CAMP?



ABOVE: A warning sign at a campground reminds visitors not to camp under trees. So why invite us to camp here at all?

Do you feel concerned when you pull into a state forest or other bush camp and look up to find it overhung by a towering eucalypt? I do.

It also puzzles me if I see a sign telling me to beware of falling branches and not to camp under the trees. I wonder: if someone's gone to the trouble of putting up a sign warning of the hazard then perhaps the state shouldn't be inviting me to camp here. Perhaps erecting a sign – and appealing to campers' common sense – may not satisfy the state's duty of care. After all, health and safety precautions for forestry workers insist on hard hats being worn in any forest at all times. So falling branches are recognised as a real and present danger in the bush.

It's a vexed issue.

There have been a number of court cases here in Australia and overseas where people injured by falling trees or branches (or posthumously, their next of kin) have claimed damages against the owner-occupier of the land where the incident has occurred. Some of these cases were usefully summarised by Tony Wilson in an issue of the *Australian Property Law Bulletin* published in 2004. He quotes a Victorian case involving the Department of Natural Resources and Energy where the judge said:

"The risk [of injury from falling or fallen

trees or branches] is... part and parcel of the recreation of camping, walking and indeed living outdoors in the Australian bush and in particular in forest reserves."

But this view doesn't entirely address the issue. As usual, every case is considered on its merits and factors such as the location of the tree and relevant policy considerations may play a part in the establishing who bears the responsibility. Indeed, the existence of a warning sign is a factor that may push the obligation to take care more firmly on to your shoulders.

As campers, we should keep in mind that there are some particular characteristics of formed campsites that might actually


"A common result is dieback of branches in the crowns of the trees, and these will eventually be shed"

increase the risks of falling branches by comparison to less populated areas. For example, compaction of soil by vehicles in

parking and camping areas – or in the vicinity of picnic tables – is unfavourable to tree health. Uptake of water and nutrients by fine roots mostly occurs in the top 30cm of soil, and these fine roots are readily damaged and their regeneration impaired by soil compaction. A common result is dieback of branches in the crowns of the trees, and these will eventually be shed, becoming a danger to those below.

An associated danger is 'widow makers' – branches that are way up in the tree that have broken off and then lodged precariously in the crown. These could fall at any time, on campers or anyone else.

Indeed, it's in the very nature of native eucalypts to drop limbs even on calm days. It's not the sort of thing that lends itself to experimentation, but seasoned foresters have suggested that high temperatures may cause cracking of branches with existing rot. Other theories blame internal cracks or microscopic changes in tree cells (Kramer, *Popular Mechanics*, 17 May 2012).

The bottom line is that, when we choose to get outdoors, we must accept there are risks. Whether from stings, bites, sprains, burns or from being struck by a falling tree limb – without understanding how to mitigate these risks, a weekend away can turn from relaxation to tragedy in a matter of moments. 

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On the road: Alison & Jaxon Finch

THERE ARE MANY MORE CHAPTERS TO ALISON FINCH'S SELF-STYLED, ALBEIT SPORADIC, AUSTRALIAN STORY.

We were travelling along the southern coast of South Australia, on our way to catch the ferry to Kangaroo Island when we saw Alison Finch with her friends' Eco-Tourer set up at Second Valley. Alison was with her 12-year-old nephew Jaxon and the rig they were pulling was an eye-catching setup. Looking like a hybrid between a caravan and a pop-top, but with a wedge-shaped construction when erected, we were compelled to have a closer look.

When we did so, it was clear that the Eco-Tourer is a unique piece of kit. It's a folding camper that converts quickly to a hard-sided caravan-style configuration using a handle to move the panels into position. With a fibreglass construction and aerodynamic design, Alison told us the Eco-Tourer is "comfortable, and extremely quick and easy to set up and tow".

Alison is no stranger to camping. She grew up as a property owner's daughter and remembers camping while droving 3000 sheep through the Riverina with her dad when

drought hit them hard in the late 70s. For her family, these experiences have led to a wanderlust that's dug in deep. "My mother's now 84," Alison said. "But she and I recently finished an 18-week trip covering 1900km through NT, WA and SA." Jaxon joined them in Perth for the school holidays and loved it. So when we met them, he and Alison were enjoying a weekend at Second Valley and Rapid Bay chasing squid.

Alison hits the road these days for the fresh air, for the opportunity to see new places, to stop for a brew at some unusual roadhouses and to "meet with terrific Australian characters". Having recently retired, she's looking forward to a deeper association with recreational camping than she's had time to enjoy in recent years. Nowadays, she's happy to be using the Eco-Tourer which her good friends have offered her on loan, any time she wants.

As Alison says, "the reality is, if power is available, little is needed".

We reckon Australia's roads will be seeing a lot more of Alison and the Eco-Tourer in the years to come. **CTA**



WORDS AND PICS
SCOTT HEIMAN

ABOVE: Alison and her nephew Jaxon spent the weekend chasing squid.

WHO ARE THEY?

Names: Alison and Jaxon Finch

Home: Mount Pleasant, SA

Home on the road: Eco-Tourer

Camper modifications: Nil

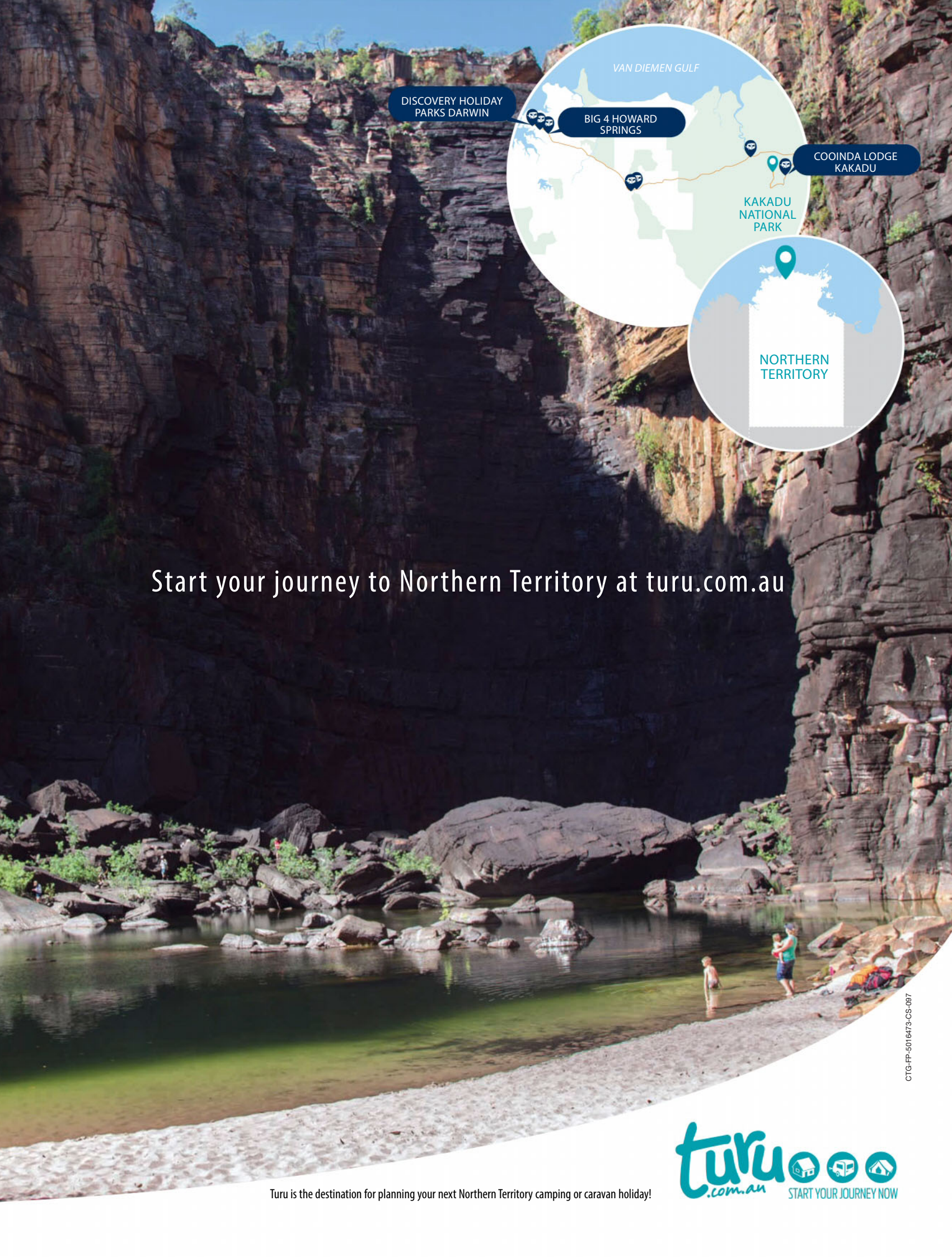
Tow vehicle: Mitsubishi Pajero

Vehicle modifications: Nil

Favourite destination: Rapid Bay, SA

Scariest moment: Alison told us she won't forget "being overtaken by a driver who forgot he was towing a small vehicle swaying behind!"

Lessons learned: Having been on the road periodically throughout her life, Alison knows the importance of taking alternate forms of communication when travelling to account for telecommunications 'black spots' across the country. She's found this particularly important when travelling in remote parts of WA and the NT.



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The Hunger Games

A COUPLE OF 'CAMP DOGS' INSPIRED THIS HEARTY FEAST.



I've just spent a week away with some industry heavyweights at the annual judging for *4X4 Australia* magazine's prestigious 4X4 of the Year awards.

And when I say heavyweights, I mean people the ilk of Ron Moon, Mat Raudonikis, John Rooth, Dean Mellor, Dave Morley and Norm Needham.

And then there were the 'backroom boys' in Off Road Images shooter and videographer Michael Ellem, and super snapper Nathan Jacobs. These boys don't often get a mention in these types of gigs but, without them, magazines such as *CTA*, *4X4 Australia*, and many other titles, simply wouldn't be what they are.

It's the images and, in more recent times, video that takes the reader on a visual tour de force. It's what makes these titles the icons that they are.

But from my perspective, the backroom boys are also the 'camp dogs'. I mean every good camp has a dog that just eats what it's

given – two and sometimes three helpings then there are the scraps. Nothing's wasted when Michael and Nathan are in camp. But it's actually understandable.

Nathan is but a wisp of a man. Wouldn't weigh the same as Ron Moon's left leg, but can he eat! He reckons he's got a very high metabolism but I just think he's got worms.

And then there's Michael. Well, he never stands still, lives on coffee and adrenalin, and never misses a shooting opportunity. If you get up to the call of nature in the middle of the night, you'll regularly see Michael still working on his pics. Tweaking them and processing data.

So that explains their addiction to food. It's a commitment to their craft that sees them both burning calories long after the judging has finished for the day.

And then there's the other end of the scale. The commitment to their craft sees the judges – well, most of them – artificially testing the award finalists at their GVM, all

without even adding anything to the tub of the utes.

That's the type of innovation that sets *4X4 Australia* magazine's awards apart from any other. These men have put their bodies on the line, not to mention their coronary care, to make sure these vehicles have been tested thoroughly.

And when they're totally spent at the end of the day – judging, eating, and more judging before finally collapsing in front of a fire with chips, dips and nibbles – it's my job to keep their weight in check for another day of gruelling judging.

But it was John Rooth who said it best. "I'll just never be six pounds three ounces ever again." He's given up ever trying to get back to his original weight.

So that's where I come in. Just as an army marches on its stomach so, too, do the judges. The fact you could feed your average platoon on the food I dished up says volumes I think, about how alike our

team and an army platoon are.

So have a go at these recipes; it kept the judges in fine fettle, and I'm sure it will do so for you too!

VIETNAMESE PORK ROLLS

FOR THE PORK

- 400g pork fillet
- 1 sachet Red Pork seasoning mix

FOR THE PICKLED CARROT

- ½ cup white vinegar
- ½ cup white sugar
- Fish sauce, good dash to taste
- 1 large carrot, peeled, coarsely shredded
- 2 Vietnamese baguettes (I used ciabatta rolls)
- Mayonnaise
- 2 spring onions, green part only, sliced along diagonal
- 1 Lebanese cucumber, sliced
- 2 cups finely sliced lettuce
- ½ cup coriander leaves
- Kecap manis and sliced red bird's-eye chillies to serve

Marinate and cook pork according to packet directions or, alternatively, purchase directly from your local Chinese or Vietnamese restaurant.

Meanwhile, combine the vinegar and sugar and whisk till the sugar is dissolved. Add fish sauce, tasting till right. Add the carrot and set aside for 15 minutes. Remove from marinade and squeeze out excess.

Cut rolls and spread with mayonnaise. Assemble with all of the ingredients and add kecap manis and chillies to taste.

BEEF & VEGETABLE STIR-FRY

- 1 onion, halved and sliced
- 1 medium carrot, cut into batons
- 2 sticks celery, sliced on the diagonal
- 1 tbsp garlic
- 1 tbsp ginger
- 500g blade steak, sliced finely
- 1 zucchini, sliced on the diagonal
- 1 small red capsicum, sliced
- 1 green capsicum, sliced
- 3 tbsp sweet chili sauce
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp cornflour

To a very hot wok add the onion, celery, garlic and ginger and stir-fry till the onion is translucent. Add the meat and stir-fry until browned. Add the balance of vegetables and stir regularly until just cooked. Add some water if the mix is dry whilst doing this step. Finally, add the sweet chili and soy sauce and stir to combine. Meanwhile, in a bowl, mix the cornflour in half a cup of water and then add to the wok. Stir




through until the cornflour has thickened into a sauce.

Serve with steamed basmati rice.

PUDDING IN A BAG

- Any self-saucing pudding you like. I used a chocolate one.
- 1 Ziploc bag

Mix ingredients like you would if you were making any cake.

Add the mix to a large Ziploc bag and place into a large pot of boiling water. Cook until the pudding is firm to the touch. Serve with cream or ice cream. 

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Beef and vegetable stir-fry will satisfy appetites after a hard day out on the tracks; These pork rolls are the perfect fusion of Vietnamese and French flavours; Pudding in a bag? What could be simpler.



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> DARGO HOTEL, VIC

PHOTOGRAPHER

Nathan Jacobs

GEAR

Canon EOS-1DX, f/4, 1/40 second,
ISO 1250 @ 24mm

Events

WITH ALI
MILLAR



WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE COUNTRY THIS MONTH?

QLD

AUSTRALIAN SAND SCULPTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Feb 5-28

Watch artisans carve a

large trail of characters from DreamWorks films across the Gold Coast amid related events and exhibitions.

Sand Safari, Surfers Paradise, (07) 5584 3700, www.surfersparadise.com

MORETON BAY CARAVAN, CAMPING, BOATING AND 4X4 EXPO

Feb 19-21

Check out some of Australia's best camper trailers, caravans and boats with plenty of travel, camping and 4WDing accessories and advice also on show!

Redcliffe, www.bayexpo.com.au

EIDSVOLD CUP RACES

Feb 20

Enjoy a day out with the family at the country races. Featuring a fashions on the field, a barbecue, bar and canteen, with free camping available and free local buses to take you to the race track.

Eidsvold, ljmor161@bigpond.com, www.bundabergregion.org/destinations/eidsvold/events/eidsvold-cup-races

HAVE A GO! FESTIVAL

Feb 20-21

Try your hand at more than 40 heritage trades and crafts like stick-furniture making, pottery, lacemaking, blacksmithing and millinery at Cobb+Co Museum's annual heritage skills celebration.

Toowoomba, inquiries@cobbandco.qm.qld.gov.au, www.cobbandco.qm.qld.gov.au

NSW

NEWCASTLE CARAVAN, CAMPING AND HOLIDAY EXPO

Feb 5-7

Browse more than 180 carav-

an, 4WD and camper trailer related exhibits with RVs, camping equipment, tents and top destinations on display.

Newcastle Entertainment Centre and Showgrounds, www.caravan-camping.com.au

BLUE MOUNTAINS UKULELE FESTIVAL

Feb 12-14

More than 100 acts play across nine stages in a free event hosted by Blue Mountains Ukulele Group volunteers. Get along for some foot-tapping and knee-slapping fun.

Katoomba, www.bluemugs.com.au

ILLAWARRA CARAVAN, CAMPING, 4WD, AND FISH SHOW

Feb 19-21

See the latest in camping and 4WDing innovations, with destinations, RVs plus boating and touring accessories on display. Family entertainment includes a freestyle bike, fishing and reptile awareness shows.

Kembla Grange, www.ruralscene.com.au

KING OF THE RANGES STOCKMAN'S CHALLENGE AND BUSH FESTIVAL

Feb 25-28

Watch Australian stockmen and women showcase traditional skills still employed today and enjoy a camp over dinner, family bush dance and other bush festival events.

Murrurundi, www.kingoftheranges.com.au

VIC

SWEET VALLEY SOUNDS

Feb 6

Pack a picnic lunch, set up under a shady tree and enjoy

local food, wines and beer (BYO) with an eclectic mix of music performed on a single stage scenic backdrop of the Kiewa Valley.

Mount Beauty, www.sweetvalleysounds.com.au

COMMONWEALTH CHAMPIONSHIP SHEPDOG TRIALS

Feb 8-14

Top dogs from each state will vie for the championship title on the Sunday, with qualifying runs for Novice, Open and Improver categories hosted during the week.

Port Fairy, (03) 5568 5232, wtdmpaton@aussiebb.com.au

SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

Feb 20

Grab a picnic rug and head to the bay for cooking demonstrations, performances from the Apollo Bay Music Festival line-up, roving performers, and market stores with local produce, wine, beer and seafood.

Apollo Bay, abayseafoodfest@gmail.com, www.apollobayseafoodfestival.com

HEYWOOD WOOD, WINE AND ROSES FESTIVAL

Feb 27

Watch the ever-popular mower races, wood chop Australian Championships, Highland Dancing State Championships with art and craft, dirt bikes, wine and cheese tasting, and rides and a parade.

Heywood, wwr@woodwinerose.com, www.woodwinerose.com

TAS

TARGA HELLYER GORGE**Feb 6**

A tarmac rally designed for rookies developing a taste for Targa at one of the sport's legendary stages. Spectators can catch the action as rally newbies tackle the windy Hellyer Gorge roads. Burnie, www.targa.com.au

THE ROYAL HOBART REGATTA**Feb 6-8**

Watch clubs and schools compete amid food and wine stalls, music, sideshow rides, wood chopping competitions, aircraft and water displays with jet skis, power boats and yachts. Hobart, www.royalhobartregatta.com

ST ANDREWS RICHMOND HIGHLAND GATHERING**Feb 21**

Watch beautiful highland dancing from the beginners to the champions on a picturesque village green, with a Pipe Band and Drum competitions rounding out the entertainment. Richmond, 0408 528 658, www.clarenceartsandevents.net/events/st-andrews-richmond-highland-gathering-2

KOONYA GARLIC FESTIVAL**Feb 27**

Sample fine Tasmanian garlic at various gourmet food and beverage stalls, enter garlic bulb competitions, with garlic talks, and classes for making delicious garlic-infused dishes. Koonya, cbadcoe@gmail.com, www.koonyagarlicfestival.com

SA

FLEURIEU HEALTH AND WELLBEING FESTIVAL**Feb 6-7**

Browse stalls and garner expert advice on alternative and natural therapies, exercise, nutrition, and general wellbeing as local health professionals showcase their wares in a market-style atmosphere. Wirrina Cove, www.facebook.com/FleurieuHealthandWellbeingFestival

LOCK CUP DAY**Feb 14**

Enjoy race day action under shade from the Lock Race Club lawn viewing mound, with full vision over the racecourse making it a great day for the whole family. Lock, lockraceclub@eyreonline.com, www.theracessa.com.au/clubs/lock

KANGAROO ISLAND CUP CARNIVAL**Feb 20**

Expect Coopers beer, Kangaroo Island wine, fine fashion, top quality racing and a great



country atmosphere during this cup day event set a spectacular Island setting.

Kangaroo Island, (08) 8537 0605, www.kiracingclub.com.au

LOXTON ANNUAL MARDI GRAS**Feb 26-28**

Enjoy a free movie screening, a pageant with more than 60 floats and bands, the Ambassador crowing, the Nippy's Loxton Gift and services commemorating those who've served the community.

Loxton, www.visitloxton.com.au/loxton_events.php

WA

PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL**Feb 11-Mar 6**

Experience excellent international and contemporary theatre, dance, music, film, visual arts and literature at a veritable feast of cutting-edge performances and activities.

Perth, boxoffice@perthfestival.com.au, www.perthfestival.com.au

SOUTH WEST CRAFT BEER FESTIVAL**Feb 13**

South-west breweries host celebrations with local produce, music and, of course, beer. Sample the region's finest brews from the traditional to the creative while listening to local live music.

Busselton, www.swbeerfest.com.au

BOYUP BROOK COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL**Feb 18-21**

Scoot your boots as John Williamson heads the three-day event as country music royalty descend upon the West Australian Country Music Awards, with a carnival, ute and truck muster.

Boyup Brook, (08) 9765 1657, www.countrymusicwa.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Festival-goers stake their patch at the South West Craft Beer festival, WA; Targa rookies taste victory at Hellyer Gorge, Tas; The Perth International Art Festival kicks on (pic Jarrod Seng), WA; Terry Drennan hosts a blacksmithing workshop at the Have a Go! Festival, Qld.

FREMANTLE SEAFOOD FESTIVAL**Feb 27-28**

Enjoy an array of fresh, local produce with live cooking demonstrations, local seafood tastings, product displays and fun and games for the whole family.

Fremantle, www.fremantleseafoodfestival.com.au

NT

GOYDER'S DAY**Feb 4**

Gather for a re-enactment of the 1869 arrival of Surveyor-General Goyder. Learn of the trials of the crew who surveyed the hinterland with displays, activities and light refreshments available.

Darwin, (08) 8981 2848.


IMPARJA CUP**Feb 8-15**

Incorporating the National Indigenous Championships, the Imparja Cup is Australia's annual National Indigenous Cricket Carnival, celebrating cricket and Indigenous culture.

Alice Springs, www.ntcricket.com.au/events/imparja-cup

ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOMBING OF DARWIN**Feb 19**

Mark this important anniversary and honour those who lost their lives and who fought to defend the border. The anniversary is commemorated each year at the Cenotaph War and Civilian memorials.

Darwin, Bicentennial Park, www.frontlineaustralia.com.au 

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PRODUCTS

SIT BACK

A camping chair is not just a camping chair it seems and, with more comfort and features than a European sports car, ARB's Sport Camping Chair is set to turn the roughest of campsites into a comfort-packed experience.

The Sport Camping Chair has a padded seat and backrest and also features a drink holder pouch, side pocket with Velcro flap for your keys or valuables, and a mesh magazine pocket on the rear – perfect for your latest issue of CTA. The chair also comes with a matching carry bag for

storing in your vehicle or van.

It wouldn't be true to its sporting blood ties if it wasn't built for durability – it's manufactured from a durable nylon Oxford weave material and rated at 120kg.

ARB SPORT CAMPING CHAIR

RRP: \$79

Where: Outdoor gear and 4X4 accessories stores

More info: www.arb.com.au

MAX HEADROOM

We all appreciate protection from the harsh elements while travelling, and that's why vehicle shade awnings are worth their weight in gold. But reality is they can often be rendered impractical due to height issues.

Well, not any longer. Rhino-Rack has developed the Dome 1300 Awning which provides additional head clearance when mounted to the front, side or rear of a vehicle.

Made from heavy duty ripstop polycotton fabric, it is not only weather/water proofed but mould resistant and UV50+ protected. The roof

also domes up, giving it superior water run-off in wet conditions.

The awning covers a large space opening out to 2.5x 2.4m and stands well over 2m depending on the vehicle you mount it to. The Dome 1300 Awning is also quick to set up and easy to use, compatible with most roof rack channels, and comes with a one-year warranty.



RHINO-RACK DOME 1300 AWNING

RRP: \$379

Where: Visit the Rhino-Rack website for your nearest distributor

More info: www.rhinorack.com.au



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PRODUCTS

QUICK STASH

Sometimes, a quick weekend can render your rear out of view once the luggage is packed.

Which is why Rhino-Rack developed the Vortex Stealthbar, a roof rack system that will carry up to 80kg of luggage including fishing rods and camping gear, to help ease back seat congestion.

Compatible with factory-raised rails, the StealthBar comes preassembled for easy, stress-free installation and features legs adjustable up to 100mm to suit a wide variety of vehicles.

The co-moulded stainless steel/rubber locking straps are designed for all size rails and the low noise, VGS rubber reduces wind vibrations, so

you won't be disturbed while you cruise the open road.

Available in black and silver, the StealthBar comes in seven different lengths from 725-1075mm to suit your vehicle and storage needs. And as the StealthBar is supported by a lifetime warranty, you can rest assured your gear is in safe hands.

RHINO-RACK VORTEX STEALTHBAR

RRP: \$379

Where: Visit the Rhino-Rack website for your nearest distributor

More info: www.rhinorack.com.au

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Advertisers' index

| | | | | | |
|--|-------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|-----|
| ALTITUDE CAMPERS, QLD | 121 | GLOBAL IMPORT CORPORATION, NSW | 52/53 | SOUTHERN LAND CAMPERS, VIC | 61 |
| ARB CORPORATION LTD, VIC | 171 | IRONMAN SUSPENSION, VIC | 6/7 | SPINIFEX CARAVANS, QLD | 19 |
| AUSSIE SWAG CAMPERS, QLD | 20 | IVAN CAMPERS, NSW | 83 | TAIPAN CAMPER TRAILERS, QLD | 26 |
| AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURED CAMPER TRAILER GUILD, NSW | 115 | JAYCO CORPORATION, VIC | 73 | TJM PRODUCTS, QLD | 71 |
| BEST WATER FILTERS, QLD | 168 | KELLY CAMPERS, QLD | 139 | TRACKABOUT OFF ROAD CAMPERS, QLD | 25 |
| BROADWATER CAMPERS, QLD | 166 | LUMBERJACK CAMPERTRAILERS, VIC | 81 | TRAKMASTER, VIC | 49 |
| CENTRAL 4WD CENTRE, VIC | 168 | MARKET DIRECT CAMPERS, QLD | 39 | TRAVELANDER INTERNATIONAL, QLD | 13 |
| COMPLETE CAMPSITE, NSW | 63 | MARS CAMPERS, VIC | 4/5 | TRAYON, QLD | 123 |
| DOMETIC GROUP, VIC | 17 | MOUNTAIN TRAIL, NSW | ISFC/2 | ULTIMATE OFF-ROAD CAMPERS, NSW | 138 |
| EAGLE TRAILERS & CAMPERS, SA | 32/33 | OVESCO, NSW | 168 | VEHICLE COMPONENTS, QLD | 15 |
| EMU CAMPER TRAILERS, QLD | 122 | PIONEER CAMPERS, VIC | 172 | VISTA RV CROSSOVER, VIC | 51 |
| ESPRESSO UNPLUGGED, NSW | 148 | PRIME CAMPERS AND TRAILERS, SA | 130 | WESTERNPORT CARAVANS, VIC | 146 |
| ETF, NSW | 131 | RHINOMAX, QLD | 31 | WILD BOAR CAMPER TRAILERS, QLD | 16 |
| | | SKAMPER KAMPERS, NSW | 8/9 | | |

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Dreaming of a boys fishing trip or taking the kids away in the family caravan? Get one step closer with ARB Summit Rear Step Tow Bar. Built around a tubular steel subframe, a class leading design and a no compromise approach to protection and performance, the ARB Summit Rear Step Tow Bar will bring you one step closer to any outback getaway.



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